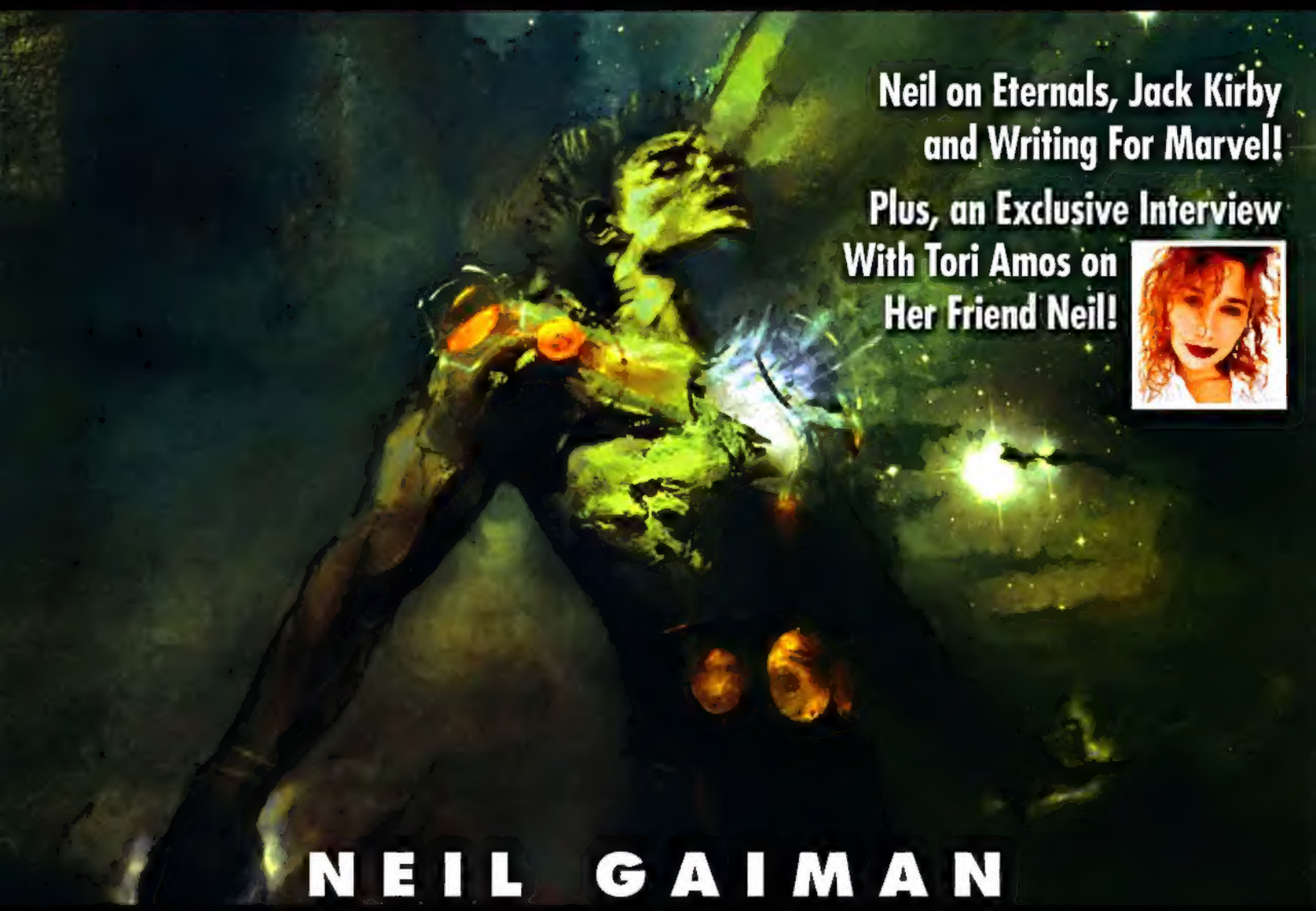
MARVEL SPOTLIGHT



Neil on Eternals, Jack Kirby and Writing For Marvel!

Plus, an Exclusive Interview With Tori Amos on Her Friend Neil!

NEIL GAIMAN

SALVADOR LARROCA

Salvador Larroca on His Early Years At Marvel, Stan Lee Meeting Dr. Doom, and Drawing the X-Men Universe!

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PLUGGING IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Thanks for joining *Marvel Spotlight* once again to get an inside look at the top creators working at Marvel!

First on tap is one of the all-time great comic writers, **NEIL GAIMAN**. He's won awards like the Eisner, the Hugo and the Nebula Awards for his writing; in fact, he's won them many times over! Neil is commonly referred to as one of the greatest writers on the comics scene today, and now that he's working with Marvel, don't expect the accolades to stop! In our interview with Neil, we cover all quarters of *The Eternals*, his current project with Marvel in tandem with ultra-hot artist John Romita, Jr., as well as discuss his enduring respect for comic legend Jack Kirby, the original creator of *The Eternals*.

We also have an exclusive interview with Neil's good friend and creative soul mate Tori Amos. Neil and Tori have been connected since before her years of performing stardom, and it seemed that if *Spotlight* wanted to get to the bottom of what makes Neil so great, she'd be the person to talk to! Tori is also involved in a CD tribute to Neil titled *Where's Neil When You Need Him?*, a 17-track album due in July featuring original song tributes from a myriad of recording artists, all of whom have an abiding appreciation for Neil Gaiman and his writing. We talk to some of the artists about this project and their feelings about Neil.

As if that's not enough, we also have quite the cherry on top with a profile of an artist who has become synonymous with the 21st Century of X-Men comics, **SALVADOR LARROCA**! He's as prolific as they come, drawing dozens of issues of *X-Men*, *Uncanny X-Men* and *X-Treme X-Men* over the last several years, all in his sensitive and sensual style. He has just wrapped up his tenure on *X-Men*, and we'll be looking back at his work on the mutant universe, while looking ahead at his super-cool project with Stan Lee, in which the Marvel legend meets his devilishly evil creation, Dr. Doom, and *newuniversal*, where Salvador gets to rebuild the New Universe from the ground up with writer Warren Ellis!

Now, go put on some Tori Amos (may I suggest her Chicago Theater live CD with sublime versions of "Father Lucifer" and "Cool On Your Island"?) and start digging this month's *Marvel Spotlight!*

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MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

NEIL GAIMAN • OFFICIAL HANDBOOK

REAL NAME: Neil Gaiman
DATE OF BIRTH: November 10, 1960
PLACE OF BIRTH: Portchester, Hampshire, UK
OCCUPATION: Comic book writer, novelist, filmmaker
PLACE OF RESIDENCE: Minneapolis, MN
WEBSITE: www.johncassaday.com
FIRST COMICS APPEARANCE: *Violent Cases*, Kitchen Sink, 1987
FIRST MARVEL COMICS APPEARANCE: *1602 #1*, 2003

HISTORY: There are very few comic creators of today that carry as much weight outside the comics community as within, but Neil Gaiman is one of those creators. He has won award after award signifying his stature as a writer of great renown, and not just in the world of comics, but in film and television writing and literature. His work is marked with richly drawn and accessible characters, a sense of the mystic and supernatural, and an unstinting usage of the broad palette of storytelling genres. He is as comfortable writing a shocking horror scene as he is an intensely romantic love scene. Wherever Neil needs to be to tell his story, that is where you will find him!

Neil was born in Portchester, Hampshire, England in 1960, and by the time he was a young boy he was already well steeped in the literature of writers as diverse as C.S. Lewis, JRR Tolkein, Roger Zelazny and Harlan Ellison. The broad strata of information served up to Neil's spongy little mind would equip him with the formidable arsenal he employs in his writing today. Fantasy, science fiction, horror, philosophical texts, historical texts, all the disciplines of religion and the folklore of mythology — this is the stuff upon which the little boy from Portchester reared himself as a reader. Oh, and comic books! Neil read lots and lots of comic books!

Growing up, Neil bundled his love of writing with all these influences and set out to become a writer. Initially, he was involved in journalism, writing reviews, feature articles and interviews. His first published work, in fact, was a biography on 80s phenomenons Duran Duran. This took up the first half of the decade, but the second half saw Neil climb headlong into writing comics, which is where he would gain his initial fame.

Though Neil broke ground on his writing career with the comic book, the medium he had loved since childhood, it was a form he wouldn't be content to let confine him. Like Alan Moore, Neil has imbued his writing with a perspective far beyond the limits established by what had come before. Countering the assumptions many assumed were inherent to the four-color monthly periodical, Neil brought bold characterizations, ultra-literate yet approachable dialogue, and story plots that ranged from the shocking to the sublime. Despite the sense of revelation felt by fans that, through his comics, were rediscovering what comics could be, at the same time, Neil made it all so instantly comfortable for readers.

His first major work in comics was DC's *Black Orchid*, a three-issue mini-series that set the stage for what came next, the *Sandman*. Neil's revision of DC's longstanding Sandman concept quite literally changed comics as we know them. It was a comic that became incredibly popular despite studiously avoiding the storytelling standards of the day. Morpheus as the central figure was not a "superhero" per se. The supporting casts constantly changed, and it wouldn't be guaranteed that Morpheus would even be in any particular comic! More, there were stylistic changes from issue to issue that would seem jarring by nature, but in Neil's gifted hands they were delivered seamlessly to the reader. *Sandman* attracted a huge cult following, especially among women, who it seemed had finally found a comic they could call their own (trust me on this, as one who's sister actually stole the first eight issues from me!)

Having made his name in the comics industry, Neil charted a course to tackle other writing projects. He wrote another highly-regarded series for DC with *Books of Magic*, and picked up with Eclipse Comics' *Miracleman* after close friend Alan Moore left the writing chores. Not content to stick with writing just comics, Neil collaborated with Terry Pratchett on the wistful apocalypse novel, *Good Omens*. In 1997, Neil wrote the teleplay for the BBC called *Neverwhere*, a dark urban fantasy that told the story of a parallel world called "London Below." Neil later adapted his script into a novel.

In 2001, Neil wrote *American Gods*, a novel which won the Hugo and Nebula Awards for Best Novel. Later that year, Neil started writing his first foray into Marvel Comics with a project he conceived called *Marvel 1602*, in which Neil took the core cast of Marvel's Silver Age of Comics, placed them 400 years in the past, and retold their stories in his own way. Aided by some stunning art by Andy Kubert, the combination of Neil Gaiman and Marvel Comics proved impossible to resist for comics fans, and *Marvel 1602* was the top-selling comic of the year.

Venturing into film, Neil collaborated with artist Dave McKean, a compatriot from his days on *Sandman*, on *Mirrormask*, a mix of live-action, animation and puppetry which saw its premiere in late 2005. A fantasy film in the mold of *Labyrinth*, Neil and Dave worked with the Jim Henson studios to create a story in which the central hero, a young girl named Helena, must navigate a strange otherworld in which her darker side wants to abandon her.

Today, Neil is working with artist extraordinaire John Romita, Jr. on his second Marvel project, a revitalization of Jack Kirby's 1970s epic, *The Eternals*. On the heels of the first issue of *Eternals*, the Dancing Ferret record label is issuing a tribute CD titled *Where's Neil When You Need Him?*, featuring song tributes to Neil's writing and characters from over the years.

THE NEIL GAIMAN MARVEL COMICS LIBRARY:
Eternals #1-6 (2006)
Marvel 1602 #1-8 (2002)
Marvel Spotlight: Neil Gaiman/Salvador Larroca (2006)

COLLECT 'EM IN TRADE:
Marvel 1602 HC
Marvel 1602 TPB

IN THE SHADOW OF THE CELESTIALS: Eternals escape from the Deviants under the ever-watchful eyes of the mysterious space gods. (From *Eternals #1.*)

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH NEIL GAIMAN

It's a *Marvel Spotlight* dream come true: share a phone call with Neil Gaiman and talk comics, *The Eternals*, and Jack Kirby! Tough work, brother! Tough work! Neil is a writer of longstanding reverence in this medium we love, and has the type of erudite resume one would assume might rightly include a fair bit of snobbishness towards four-color fandom. Not so! In this interview, Neil reveals his still abiding fascination with the comics he loved as a kid, and which still occupy much of his creative thoughts today, albeit in a more mature and evolved fashion.

SPOTLIGHT: Thank you so much for sharing some of your time with *Marvel Spotlight*. How are you doing today?

NEIL: Overworked, but well.

SPOTLIGHT: Overworked? Well, it has to be a good kind of overworked when you're talking about stuff like *The Eternals*, which looks to be a very exciting project, don't you think?

NEIL: Yes, it's rather fun and very, very, very strange.

SPOTLIGHT: Very strange? Well, that would be your fault, right?

NEIL: Yes, I guess! I got a lovely thing in from our colorist the other day. He sent me questions about the *Eternals* plot, which I thought was fun. Matt was getting so involved in the plot that he wanted to ask scientific questions, and then he finished by saying how amazingly "comic book" it was, which just made me amazingly happy!

SPOTLIGHT: I just had the thoroughly pleasurable experience of rereading the first *Eternals* series by Jack Kirby to prepare for our interview. Jack, and particularly his 70s work, is the reason I became a comics fan. *The Eternals* has always been one of my favorite books; it blew my mind when I was eight and nine years of age and reading this stuff on my school's playground. When I heard that you were involved in taking Jack's project up again, along with the amazing John Romita, Jr., I said to myself, "This is it!"

NEIL: Oh, and have you seen any of the art yet?

SPOTLIGHT: I've seen many of the pages as they've been trickling in. It's all explosively great stuff!

NEIL: It is great stuff, yes.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you have a similar history with *The Eternals*, of reading them when they were first published, of being entranced by their "Kirbyish" power, or are you coming to this project fresh without any previous exposure?

NEIL: I picked *Eternals* up when I was…how old? I suppose I would have been fifteen or sixteen when *Eternals* came out. I was a huge Kirby fan. He'd just gone back to Marvel after the Fourth World at DC Comics had sort of expired. He'd done a rather odd and unsatisfying *Captain America* run, which I had picked up simply because it was Kirby. And then, he did some *2001* stuff, and then *Eternals* came along, which seemed- at least at the beginning- to be Jack taking a lot of energy from his work on *2001* (you could tell that that was where his head had gone), and also, partly energy from some leftover Fourth Worldy stuff…and also that sort of Erich von Daniken spin. He took all that

and started doing something with it. And even at the time, on one hand I really liked it, and on the other hand there seemed to be a few things that were very odd about it. Chiefly- and this is interesting because in some ways, it's something I've had to cope with- the *Eternals* obviously by definition were not meant to be part of the Marvel Universe, except even back then he was getting pressure to make them part of the Marvel Universe.

SPOTLIGHT: The letters pages for *The Eternals* back then were aflame with controversy over that particular point.

NEIL: And he got around it in interesting ways. He had some SHIELD agents come around in the early issues, and the Hulk comes in for a guest shot, but it's a mechanical Hulk! (*Laughter.*) A kid gets turned into the Thing for a panel but you genuinely can't tell if it's a comics character or not. But you know, I thought it was played very well, and then after it ended, and you could see the plug getting pulled on this thing just as it was really getting going, then you get various Marvel attempts to fold the Eternals into the Marvel Universe, which is right up there with trying to crossbreed a prize greyhound with Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* You know, you just sit there going, "Uhhhh...nooooo...something is...how do they think... bleh..." (*Laughter.*) The attempts to do it sort of mucked things up a lot in terms of muddying the water of what made the Eternals interesting anyway.

DREAM OR REALITY? Neil Gaiman sets Ike Harris on the path to self-discovery of his true nature in *Eternals #1.*

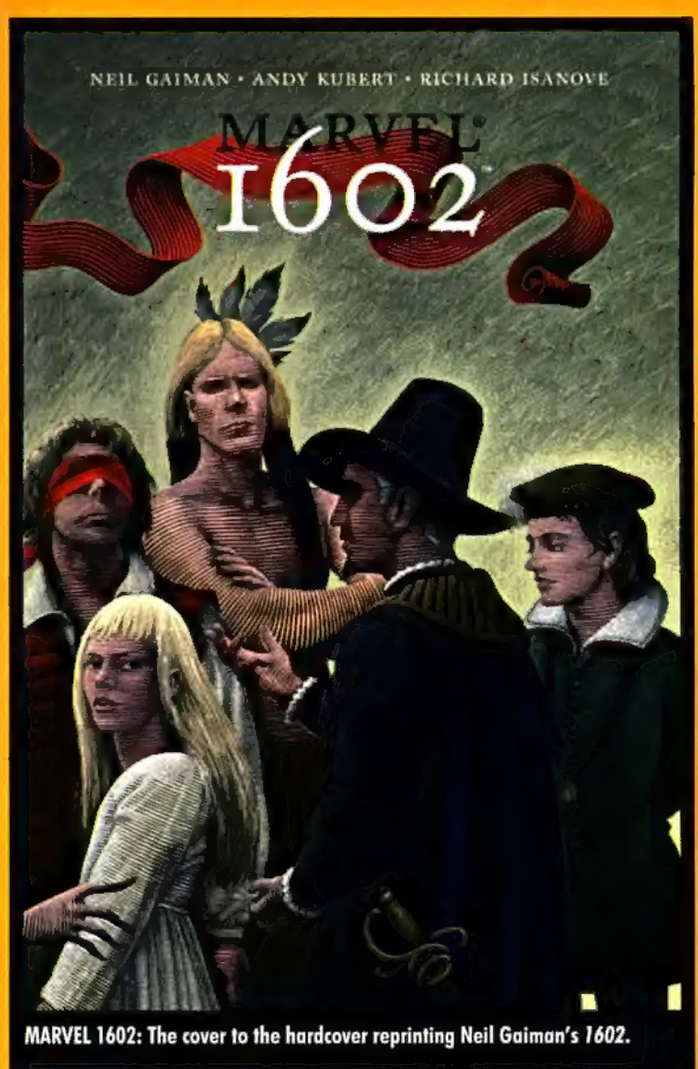
The fun thing about *The Eternals* to me is that for about two years, ever since *1602* finished, Joe Quesada and I would meet in a variety of odd places, and we'd have lunch or breakfast or dinner, and while having lunch or breakfast or dinner, I'd say, "Ok, I've got an idea for whatever Marvel Project #2 is..." and I'd run something by him. And normally I'd get to the end and he'd say, "That's really good. Trouble is, Bendis just did something like that." Or, "Bendis is halfway through something like that." Or, "We just had a meeting and Bendis is going to do something like that."

We weren't able to figure out something that would be fun for me to do. I knew I wanted to do something very different from *1602*, in that *1602* was me getting to recreate 60s Marvel and do it in my own way, in my own time. (I suppose quite literally!) So I knew I wanted to do something in the present day, and I didn't want it to have quite the same hugeness of cast of characters, which seriously bit me in the ass by the time I got to the end of *1602*, where I was looking around and going, "Great! I've still got twenty-five major players and nobody is getting the time at the end that they ought to have!" That was very frustrating.

So I knew I wanted a smaller cast. I think it would have been after the publication of *Anansi Boys*, last September, when I popped in to the Marvel offices to say hello, and I just sort of wandered into Joe's office and we were chatting, and he said, "*The Eternals.* Do you remember *The Eternals?*" And I said, "You mean Ikaris, who went under the incredibly impossible to figure out pseudonym of Ike Harris?" (*Laughter.*) And he said, "Yeaaaaah!" He asked, "Would you like to do *The Eternals*? They're sort of sitting around the corners of the Marvel Universe, and they don't really relate to anything. There's nothing we can do with them." And I thought for about thirty seconds and I said, "Yeah, send me the comics again." (And as it turned out, I still had most of them downstairs, which was kinda cool!)

Mostly, what I'd never done with *The Eternals* was read them all as a giant batch. I had read them monthly as they were coming out. At the time, I just compared them to that rock solid burning madness that was Kirby's Fourth World at its height. And I thought, "Well, that's alright." I didn't think of *Eternals* as great Kirby. But going back and reading it again, I started thinking how much I really liked the concept there, and I really liked the characters and I really wished that...(*Reflective pause.*) I don't actually know anything about the editorial history, nor have I asked — I'm sure somebody around would only be too happy to fill me in- but it definitely reads like Kirby just wants to do Kirby, and there are other forces that are saying, "Hey can you get on to that stuff, and now can you get onto this?" and some of the stuff that would have made it wonderful, mad Kirby, isn't there as much as it should be.

SPOTLIGHT: *Eternals* was quite unlike any Marvel comic that was coming out in the late 70s. At the time of publication, you have to look at the Fourth World as precedent for something like *Eternals*, but even the Fourth World was doled out over several different titles. It seemed



MARVEL 1602: The cover to the hardcover reprinting Neil Gaiman's *1602.*

ETERNALS

BY JACK KIRBY OMNIBUS

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If Neil Gaiman's new *Eternals* series has whetted your appetite for more tales of Earth's immortals, perhaps you would like to do what Neil did and go back to the beginning and read Jack Kirby's original issues. Whether you've never read this material before, or you'd like the chance to experience *Jack Kirby's Eternals* once again, Marvel is making it easy for you! They are gathering all nineteen regular issues, plus the double-sized Annual, in one complete, oversized hardcover volume called *Eternals by Jack Kirby Omnibus.*

The artwork by Jack Kirby has been newly restored, with new coloring to match the original comics. And with the oversize aspect ratio of the artwork, the only better way to see this material is to track down the original art! You wanna see the panoramic shots of the Celestials as they poke around the Andes or set down on Miami Beach? This is your book! And all of Jack's hyperkinetic double-page spreads of Eternals duking it out with Lord Kro and his Deviants? Just the thought of Jack's mind-blowing panoramas being reproduced in Marvel's wonderful oversized hardcover format gives this commentator the goose bumps!

The book clocks in at almost 500 pages, and is a complete account of 70s era Eternals, but there's a little room for some extras! Editor Mark Beazley tracked down an original Jack Kirby sketch of Ikaris that first appeared in the FOOM fanzine and later became the basis for the comic book's corner box. The book will also reproduce Jack's essay text pages, with his ruminations on the Eternals, space gods and aliens, and his approach to bringing his fantasies to his fiction! Toss in an introduction from longtime Kirby acolyte Mike Royer, and this might just be the out-of-left-field book of the year!

DUE IN LATE JUNE 2006

like Kirby wanted to jam all that good stuff from all the different Fourth World series into one, streamlined title.

NEIL: Exactly.

SPOTLIGHT: As it was, it only lasted for nineteen issues and a double-sized Annual, but if given the chance to flourish under its own device, it might have gone on even longer.

NEIL: I like to think so. So what I did, then, was basically turn around to Marvel and basically say, "Okay, in terms of what Jack has done in *Eternals*, which bits of these can I use? What is actual canon in the Marvel Universe?" They mentioned that they were very concerned about Celestials creating humanity. They said, "Nope! Celestials *definitely didn't* create humanity, but they *did* create the Eternals and the Deviants!" And I said, "Oh, okay, well I can work with that!" And after that, it was really just, for me, a matter of coming in with a bunch of ideas that would allow me to go and play with the Eternals, play with some of the ideas that Jack had begun, change some things, fix some things, totally mess up some things. The joy of comics is, as I sit here doing my reboot or whatever it is, that if it doesn't work, in ten or fifteen years time someone will pick it up and go, "Ha! Gaiman! This one really sucked. We'll toss it out and have another go again." But I think that what I'm trying to do is remain bravely true to the Kirbyness of it all. And that includes things like trying to make the Celestials rather more unknowable than they have been. I love the idea that while we will actually find out a few cool things about the Celestials, there will be slightly more, as I say, "unknowables" as there have been before. (Although some of their motivations are kind of fun.)

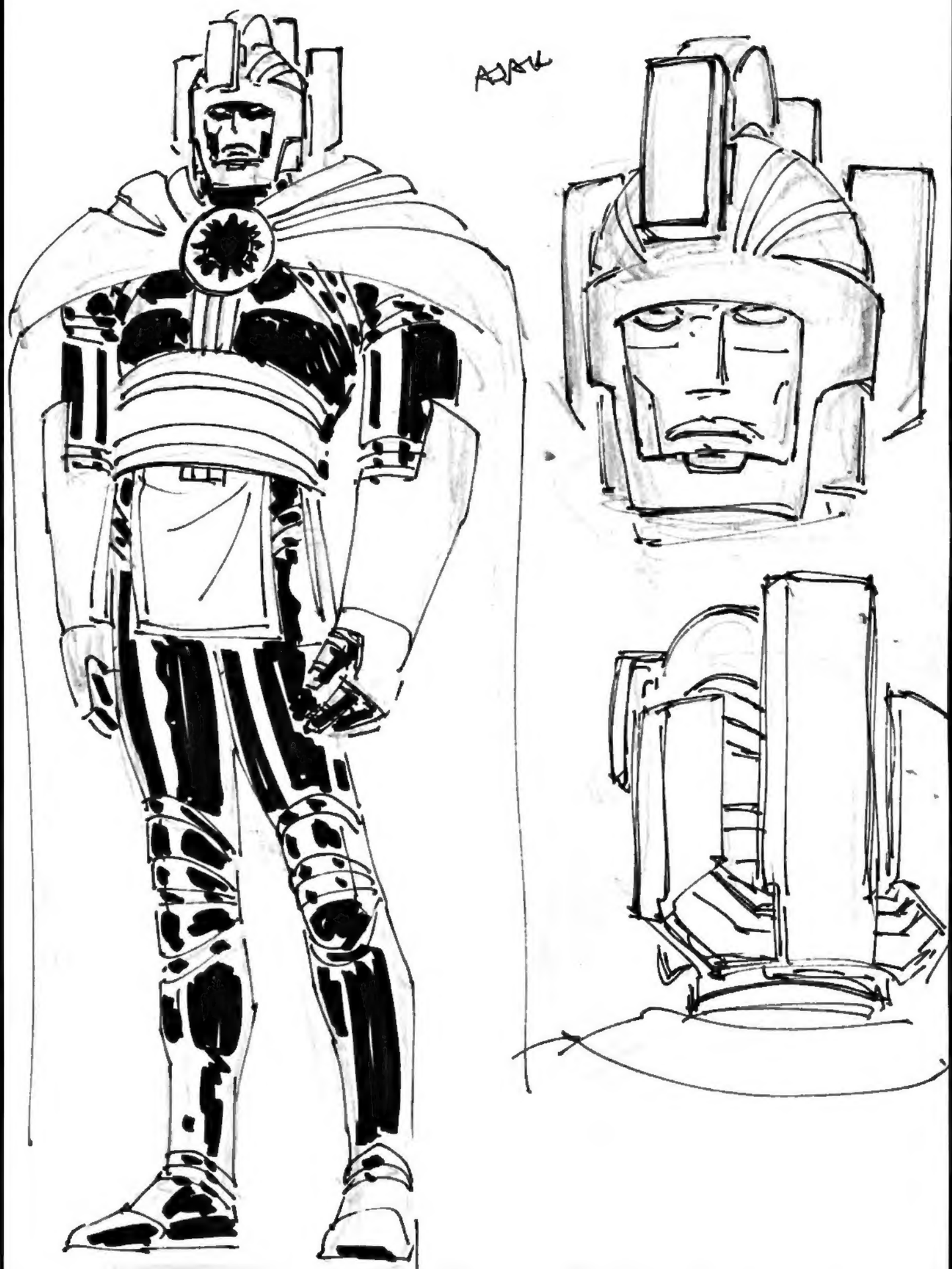
SPOTLIGHT: The Celestials were an alien race of alleged space gods, who came to Earth on many occasions, broken into different groups called Hosts. Are you working with the full complement of Celestials that Jack conjured up? And is it still the Fourth Host that will be taking the lead?

NEIL: Yes and no. We get to cover the entirety of human history, three or four times, from different points of view. Which is kind of fun! This takes us from the First Host all the way to the Fourth Host. And we get to experience several events from several different points of view. I don't know that it's giving too much away to suggest that we are beginning in a world in which it would appear that all of the Eternals are here on Earth, and as far as we can tell they are regular human beings, but the only one who seems to have any inkling of what he is — or what he believes he is — is Ike Harris, or Ikaris…and he may well be barking mad. (*Laughter.*)

SPOTLIGHT: Well, that's nothing unusual for the Eternals! They have been many things over the years to many different people. Obviously, you have an abiding interest in mythology and how it has worked itself into the fabric of human understanding, and that is pretty much what Jack was after with Eternals, so this seems to be really simpatico with you.

NEIL: Oddly enough, I'm playing much less with that than I thought I would. Partly I think because I've done that, and partly because once Jack had set it up, he lost interest in it, too; you know, I think he was interested in it much more from a "Chariot of the Gods" point of view: "Look, Ikaris was the dove who led Noah's Ark to safety!" They turn up and people thought they were "the gods."

SPOTLIGHT: Ajak was thought to be Quetzalcoatl by the Mesoamerican cultures.



AJAK

The Eternal Ajak, rendered by artist John Romita, Jr. in this black and white character sketch.

DRUIG

The Eternal Druig, rendered by artist John Romita, Jr. in this black and white character sketch. While most Eternals are pure of heart, this Polar Eternal is most definitely not!

NEIL: Exactly, and that's all kind of fun. But it doesn't actually take you terribly far, especially in a universe in which you really *do* have gods. Not to mention superheroes, not to mention races like the Inhumans, and all sorts of other strange, affiliated, extra-curricular groups. So part of what I'm having enormous amounts of fun doing with this story, I'm just trying to find out what makes the Eternals special: Who are they? What do they do? How many of them are there? And then I started trying to figure out what Jack would sort of toss in and I sort of go, "How does that work on an evolutionary basis?" For example, the Eternals are pretty much perfect. They are unkillable. According to Jack at one point, when they were trying to hypothesize ways to kill one of the Eternals, they were thinking, maybe they could disperse him into a cloud of intelligent molecules. (*Laughter.*) And you're going, "Well that's kind of..."

They're completely unkillable, they're completely healthy, they are way, way above us. They apparently breed, because Thena is Zuras' daughter and stuff...and then you're wondering, "Why haven't they out bred us? We're just humanity! Why aren't there millions and billions of them? Why is it the ones that seem to reproduce incredibly fast and hard are the Deviants, and the Deviants are all members of different species, and they've been breeding like incredibly sexed-up rabbits?"

SPOTLIGHT: Yes, and the Deviants are also very judgmental about their own progeny!

NEIL: Yes, and that was all how I began to get into it. And I also just started to pick out the characters that I liked. I'd say, "Ok, you're in the story, you're in the story. I like you, so you're in the story. I like you, but you're dead. Ok, I'm bringing you back. You're in the story, but you've been completely mucked up; well, then I'm putting you back to the way you were when Kirby did you!" (*Laughter.*) You know, and moving on from there. One of my favorite things about this — which is kind of fun, but also takes advantage of the strange flexibility of the nature of time as perceived by the Eternals and the nature of time in the Marvel Universe — is that in my story, the Third Host did indeed arrive; Arishem came down to judge. In 1976.

SPOTLIGHT: Ahhh!

NEIL: About thirty years ago! Only nobody seems to — apart from Ikaris — nobody seems to know it ever happened. And as Makarri explains to him at one point, you really would think that if a mile high red alien had landed to judge the Earth, it would have been in the news.

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) Yes, you would think! Did you ever read *Chariot of the Gods*? That book that alleged a connection between humanity and outer space aliens was quite the phenomenon in the mid-1970s, and it was obviously an inspiration for Jack on *The Eternals*. What do you make of that book and what it meant at the time, and what it means now?

NEIL: One of the things it is now is just noise. Now it's just part of the cultural wallpaper. It's more cultural baggage. At the time, I remember being fourteen or fifteen and that book being handed round in school. It was like, "No! No! The aliens came and here's the proof! How could they have built this? How could they have done that? Look! Here are guys in helmets!" (*Laughter.*)

What's fun in *The Eternals*, at least as we begin, is we see Mark Curry, alias Makarri, being incredibly doubtful about all of this kind of stuff and thinks it's silly, and when Ikaris explains to him that that is how he has the power that he has, Mark declares to him that, frankly, if Spider-Man turns up and said he got his powers from reading *Chariots of the Gods*, he'd think that he was mad. There's definitely a sort of feeling there of...you know, it was a lovely idea, and right now it's just one of thousands of lovely ideas. It also means less in the Marvel Universe. That's another way in which it made incredible sense to not put the Eternals into the Marvel Universe originally, because the Marvel Universe is filled with freaking space ships! They're landing all over the place! There's aliens left right and center. There's nothing special or exciting about the idea, "There are aliens! They might have had something to do with us!" So one of the things that is fun with this is trying to make these Celestials special in this story.

SPOTLIGHT: With their enormous size and their odd visages, Jack's visuals on the Celestials were literally out of this world. I suppose that John Romita, Jr. is doing the same thing while handling art chores on your *Eternals* series?

NEIL: The point I got excited is when the stuff from Johnny started coming my way. I just looked at this stuff and said, "Ooookay. All stops are out. This is gonna be such fun." And one of the things that's really fun in the first couple of issues is you're moving back and forth between these very human people and these very human stories, admittedly with all sorts of peculiar excitement and mysterious people and explosions and shootings and running around and kidnappings and attempted murders and stuff...but the first two or three issues are fairly normal. Except possibly the fact that we do keep cutting to a reality TV show called America's Newest Super-Heroes.

IT'S JUST SO SPRITE! A black and white Romita, Jr. sketch of Neil's Nickelodeon-ish interp of a kid's TV show featuring superpowered kids.

IKARIS/THENA

A page of original black and white art from Neil Gaiman and John Romita, Jr.'s Eternals, featuring Ikaris and Thena, two of the most powerful Eternals.

SPOTLIGHT: (*Laughter.*) Now, that sounds like an especially fruitful source of stories.

NEIL: Well, yes. Though none of the Eternals are in it, but it's a bunch of kids being run by the Wasp. You know, you've got the sort of "Marvel Civil Warry" stuff going on in the background, in a way that I hope won't bug anybody who has no idea what this is but will actually be kind of fun for anybody who does.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you expect that a lot of your fanbase, which may not be up on Marvel Comics, will be coming to this project and enjoying it? Do you write for that kind of person who is familiar with your wide expanse of work over the last twenty years, or when writing for Marvel, do you write for a Marvel type fan?

NEIL: I have no idea, just as I had no idea with *1602*. What I was doing with *1602*, was I thought, you know, it would be really fun to write something that feels like I am doing something in the Marvel Universe for the first time, I want to take all of the Marvel characters that I loved when I was seven or eight and I want to put them all in the story and have complete control over everything, including all continuity, and I'm going to set it four hundred years ago and it's going to be mine! I just wanted it to be a really fun Marvel Comic, but I wanted it to be mine! So that was my agenda with *1602*, which was not really having anything to do with anything else.

With *Eternals*, I wanted to do something that didn't feel at all like *1602*. I wanted to do something goofier, Marvellier, and with a kind of Kirbyish undertow to it. I love Kirby! I've always loved playing with Kirby ideas. As far back as *Sandman #5*, I got to do a three or four page sequence where I persuaded Sam Keith and Malcolm Jones to do pure Kirby.

SPOTLIGHT: I recall that scene vividly from when I was a kid: The Sandman in the dream world, chasing down the Skookie Bird! That was a beautiful sequence, by the way.

NEIL: Thank you! But this isn't a Kirby pastiche in the same way. This is us just going, "Okay! If you took that kind of energy, and if Jack was around now and I went to him and said, 'what do you think of me doing something like this?," and him going, 'Okay!'" That is sort of the kind of comic that I want to do. And to create a bunch of people that you care about, all of them are almost starting with no memory at all of the Eternals — the characters, that is, with the possible exception of Ikaris, and even he has some stuff that he's confused about. And I figure, what's nice about that is, everybody is starting out with a more or less blank sheet of paper. If you are completely up to date on everything that has ever happened to every member of the Eternals in the Marvel Universe ever, you may get more of a kick out of some of the things that happen. You may go, "Oh! Is that…? Okay! So…Ha ha! That's why so and so and whatever…!" But mostly, it's just something that I hope will work for somebody who has no idea what's going on, and I hope it'll work for somebody who *absolutely* knows what's going on! That's what I tried to get to happen with *1602*, something that would be just as satisfying for somebody who knew what was going on…

SPOTLIGHT: As a Marvel fan well steeped in Marvel history — and I love a big epic just like anyone — it was fun to read *1602* as it would unfold: the splendor of it all, the luxurious storytelling afforded by the big cast, all these characters that you know and love interacting with each other, out of the elements we understand them in and part of a different world that we don't intuitively understand. In comparison, unlike *1602*, I don't think a lot of people know a lot about *The Eternals*.

NEIL GAIMAN

ON THE MYTHOLOGY OF THE SUPERHERO

While *Spotlight* had Neil's attention, we figured it would be informative to get his thoughts on the nature of that stock character of Marvel Comics: the superhero. Neil writes all kinds of material and finds his sense of the heroic in all different eras in history, and he writes about them in anything but a typical fashion. So one might wonder how Neil feels about the superhero as we typically know them through comic books. The superhero seems a modern conceit: the guy or gal in flashy costume, perhaps with a flowing cape, incredible superpowers that set them above the normal humans that surround them. Here are Neil's thoughts about the superhero of today and their comparison with their antecedents from history and mythology.

NEIL: What's so interesting to me about the superhero is that while you can go back and say, "Well, Hercules is a superhero I suppose," and you've got Roland, you've got these wonderful heroes, like Scarlet Pimpernel, or the kind of people Alan Moore played with in *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (like Alan Quatermain, the Invisible Man, Captain Nemo and the rest.) But I think what fascinates me most about the superhero is that the actual "superheroeness" was completely of its time.

It all kicks off with Superman! I find that sort of awesome. It was honestly as if Siegel and Shuster had happened onto some hitherto undiscovered elements. It was pure, this thing was pure teenage wish fulfillment. And pure teenage wish fulfillment wrapped up in a weird kind of shape that kids related to in one way and adults related to in another, and that was somehow special and tied into flashy costumes. There isn't anything that you can point to that's equivalent. Yes, it is very easy to say, well, "Here is a Baron Munchausen story," or the equivalent of that folk tale where the guy has one brother who can run faster than anybody, and one that can hear a feather fall in a forest a mile away, and one who was stronger than anybody.

But that's not what Superman was about. Most heroes in the past did things by their wits. I do think that most superheroes do things by their wits, but the idea of folding stuff up into, as I say, this wonderful sort of strange recipe that's a jigger of myth, a dash of costume, a dash of magic, and five parts preadolescent magical wish fulfillment *"Oh my God if I was just this…"* and somehow folded into this bizarre psychosexual angst, it becomes kind of special. And kind of unique. One minute there weren't any of them, and the next minute, how many of them? Hundreds? Five hundred? You're in the amazing time when Eisner and Iger were doing their thing, and anyone who could pick up a pencil was creating superheroes. And pretty much anyone who can pick up a pencil has been creating them ever since.

FANTASTIC FOUR IN 1602: Neil Gaiman's proof that there were superheroes before Superman! (From *1602* #6.)

ETERNALS #1: John Romita, Jr.'s bristling variant cover to Neil's first issue of *Eternals*!

Their history with Marvel has been rendered in a scattershot manner: once Jack's series ended, they sort of went away, then they came back for a supporting run on Thor, then they went away and came back for a mini-series in the mid-80s. Are you up on many of those stories?

NEIL: Some of those I've read, some I'm only familiar with through summaries.

SPOTLIGHT: Did any of that stuff grab you at all?

NEIL: Mostly as stuff that needed to be fixed. Mostly, just feeling like, this isn't what Jack would have done. This isn't where he was going. Now, I know that my thing isn't where Jack was going, but I hope that with my thing, at least by the end of it, we'll have the Eternals in a place that feels comfortable and usable. I don't feel like any of the previous stuff that wasn't Kirby increased their usability. Does that make any sense?

SPOTLIGHT: Absolutely. You've got your eye on their utility as Marvel characters while still keeping them in the Kirby ballpark.

NEIL: Yes, there would keep being these attempts to make a case for how they fold into the Marvel Universe, but by the end of which you'd go, "But they're just a bunch of super-powered people!" And that's one thing that the Marvel Universe simply does not need is a bunch more super-powered people. There are super-powered people all over the place!

SPOTLIGHT: It seems as if the main purpose of the stories was to fix them into the Marvel Universe rather than to simply tell a good Eternals story. Of course, there was a lot of good stuff there…

NEIL: Oh, and I'm not saying that it was all rubbish, because there was some very, very good stuff there. But I think what there also was was something very…(*Pause.*) I think I just felt like, you know, you didn't actually come away from any of that going, "Okay, *now* I get how they fit into the Marvel Universe and why they are cool!"

SPOTLIGHT: The front cover of Jack Kirby's *Eternals #1* has Ike Harris alerting his human friends saying, "We have found the space gods… and they're not dead!" Knowing that you are taking on this project, that statement reminds me of the Endless, the brethren who held court in your seminal *Sandman* comic all those years. I am wondering if there is any correlation in your mind between the Endless and the Eternals that you are bringing into the work?

NEIL: No…don't think that there is any correlation. Nor is it really… to be honest, if that was where it was going, I wouldn't bother. It would be kind of like somebody saying, "Neil, do Nightmare!" Ohhh…no… why would I want to do Nightmare? I already did Sandman! The joy in doing this for me is not doing gods, and it's not doing people as gods. The joy of this is trying to play with that Kirby madness.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you ever have the chance to meet him?

NEIL: I didn't. And I'm still kicking myself to this day. I was in San Diego in 1992, I guess, or maybe possibly even in 1993. I'm just trying to remember it properly. I had flown in to do something or other in San Diego, I came down on the lift and there was Jack talking to Paul Levitz, and…I was late for my plane! And I thought, "Shall I go over and get Paul to introduce me, shake his hand and tell him how important he is to me?" And then I thought, you know, there will be another convention. Then I got to the San Diego Airport — that little tiny airport they used to have — and I waited. For three hours. For a delayed plane. Kicking myself! And a few months later he was dead.

MARVEL PROJECT #1: Neil's first turn with Marvel was 1602, featuring America's first born native child, Virginia Dare, and her Native American protector, Rojhaz. This lush illustration by Andy Kubert is from the 1602 #2.

SPOTLIGHT: Talk about your comic book idolatry: Jack Kirby is number one for me, and I know I'm not alone. I had actually gotten out of reading comics in about 1990 — the only one I was keeping up with at the time was *Sandman*, ironically. I recall being out of the loop on comics news for the most part, but when I heard that Jack had died, it was devastating to me. His creative output was seminal in establishing the sense of wonder that I carry through this life. When you figure who's on the metaphorical Mt. Rushmore of the comic art medium, Jack Kirby is on there — without a doubt.

NEIL: I was very lucky recently. I was staying at the house of a friend, doing some work, and my friend had bought on ebay most of the first 100 issues of *Fantastic Four*, in rubbishy, reading condition. And, I actually got to do that thing of, you know, lie in the bath and read them through…(*Laughter.*)…with the ads and with that sense of wonderful Kirbyish excitement. Smart Stan dialogue, that Kirby energy, and you know, he's one of the people who's work I…(*Pause.*)….the weird thing about Kirby is, especially when he moved to DC, there was this little period where I was eleven years old, maybe ten, and for a little bit it was *too weird* for me. And then it *wasn't* too weird for me any more. There was this point in there when I picked up *New Gods* and there would be these Kirby energy blasts, these black things surrounded by orangey flames and I'd say, "What the heck is that?" My little ten year old head would go, "Fire doesn't look like that!" and then you look at his women and go, "Women don't look like that!" And then after awhile, you just came to accept it. This is the Kirbyverse. This is what fire looks like in the Kirbyverse. This is what women look like in the Kirbeyverse.

"WE'RE ETERNALS, BUDDY!" Ikaris greets fellow Eternal Makarri to give him the scoop. (From Eternals # 1.)

SPOTLIGHT: How much of your *Eternals* series will be a strict homage to Jack and his legacy?

NEIL: There's no way that we are doing *The Eternals* as any kind of homage to Jack. It's not a pastiche, it's not any of those kinds of things. I thought about it…as I started writing, I thought that every ten pages I'd do a double page spread and call it a chapter heading or whatever. And I thought, you know what? That's not Jack, and that's not what we're doing.

My friend Roger Zelazny died very shortly before I finished *American Gods* and with that I guess my agenda was to write the kind of book that Roger would have liked. The happiest I got was about a year after *American Gods* came out and I got a note from Roger's girlfriend, when he died, and she said, "I think he would have really liked this book." That was who I wrote it for. And with this, I'm writing the kind of book that I think Jack would have liked. He would have read it and gone, "I wouldn't have done things like that. Ohhh, why are they doing that?!?! Ohhh why are they standing around talking! All these people standing around talking!" (*Laughter.*) But I think that I'd like to do a comic that he would have liked.

SPOTLIGHT: I definitely think you're on the right track so far. Your theme for Eternals is very similar in tone to Jack's, and the bombast brought to the artwork by John Romita, Jr…I'm sure he would have liked that element. The images that I've seen fit squarely into the realm of "Kirbyness." How far along are you right now?

NEIL: I'm halfway through issue #2, but most of it is in note form. Once I get off doing interviews, I have to go and type it up. The only thing that troubles me, though in some ways it kind of adds a wonderful sort of Kirbyish pressure to the whole thing, is that at the point where Johnny became free and I was ready to start, the message came from Marvel, "OK and we're putting this out in June!" (*Laughter.*) OK, when we did *1602*, we worked a year ahead so that we had six issues done before the first issue hit. And this one, we'll be lucky to have finished number three and if any of us get a cold, we're screwed. (*Laughter.*) You just have to hope that none of us get a cold.

SPOTLIGHT: Don't slip in the bath reading those FF comics!

NEIL: Yes, and be careful with what we eat.

SPOTLIGHT: Do those pushups, too!

Thanks to Neil for sitting with us and talking Eternals! By the time this interview hits the stands, the first double-sized issue of Eternals by Neil and John Romita, Jr. should be on stands, but you'd better hurry! It 's bound to sell out quick! Look forward to the rest of the six-issue mini-series to continue through to the end of the year!

"We rode the tube and he said, 'Listen, things are gonna get better. I really feel this. I've got a good feeling about this! You won't have to sing "Crucify" at birthdays for the rest of your life!'"

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH TORI AMOS

The friendship between superstar singer/songwriter Tori Amos and writer Neil Gaiman goes back fifteen years, to the days when Tori was one of many hungry musicians in the Los Angeles scene, earnestly trying to assert herself commercially in the artform she loved. In the early 90s, the piano songstress was cautiously navigating her way through an early-career stall after the ill-conceived *Y Kant Tori Read* album went nowhere on the charts. Meanwhile, Neil was flourishing as a writer, having already seen *Sandman* emerge as the elite comic of its era while simultaneously launching his career as a novelist with *Good Omens*. As if put in play by Morpheus himself, fate found a way to put Tori's talents square into Neil's sights, and he quickly sized her up for the singular and rare talent that she was. The relationship that followed has a history marked by their mutual fans as one of the great platonic love affairs in modern popular art.

Neil was an early and ardent supporter of Tori's music, at a time when she was trying to boldly assert herself in a business that can be so casually indisposed to a young woman of her unbridled artistic independence. Shortly after they met and began to forge their utterly loyal lifelong friendship, she released her startlingly fresh album *Little Earthquakes*. The record was an awakening, not just for her, but especially for the legions of young women who adopted Tori as their spiritual standard bearer. *Little Earthquakes* spoke through a diverse range of personalities: the scarlet-tressed wild woman bravely testifying in "Crucify," the gorgeously ineffable "Silent All These Years," and the impossible-to-ignore eyewitness account to rape, "Me and a Gun." Taking cues and inspiration from forebears like Kate Bush and Joni Mitchell and synthesizing them all into something uniquely her own, Tori had made her bold statement...and people were listening.

Much like it was with Nirvana, who blasted onto the scene at a similar time, most music fans remember when they heard their first Tori song or saw their first Tori video. She not only left an impression on the minds of listeners, but has built a loyal fanbase that guarantees each new album release a Top 10 sales ranking. And part of that fanbase, through it all, has been Neil Gaiman. His support and encouragement during Tori's earliest days of non-stardom has not been forgotten. Over time, Neil and his influence has been namedropped in the lyrics to several of Tori's songs, and she has regularly tapped him to pen liner notes for her album releases and write prose for her tour programs. In return, Neil found himself incorporating Tori's personality into his *Sandman* characters, most especially the lovingly crafted lunacy of Delirium. The mutual inspiration these two find in each other has played out in their own respective works so often, Neil has been quoted as stating flatly that the two "steal shamelessly from each other."

Rarely have two disciplines like writing and popular music been so purposely intermingled based on a simple love and respect between two creators at the very top of their respective pursuits; these are two very special people who have had a significant impact on each other and their art. *Marvel Spotlight* caught up with Tori in England as she was having a tea during a break recording songs for a new album, her followup to the 2005 Top 5 album, *The Beekeeper*. The subject? Why, her buddy Neil, of course!

SPOTLIGHT: You came to know of Neil's work before your breakthrough record, *Little Earthquakes*. You had been reading his work for a while when you met him. How did you come across his comics work?

TORI: There was a friend of mine that was crashing at my place in Hollywood. His name was Rantz Hosely, and he was an art student, an illustrator who was into comics. He collected everything from *Sandman*, so this was probably in 1990; I think around the time of "*The Doll's House*," maybe? I would start to steal his comics, but I would always give them back...eventually! I began to immerse myself in them. I was really drawn to the mythological aspect of Neil's work.

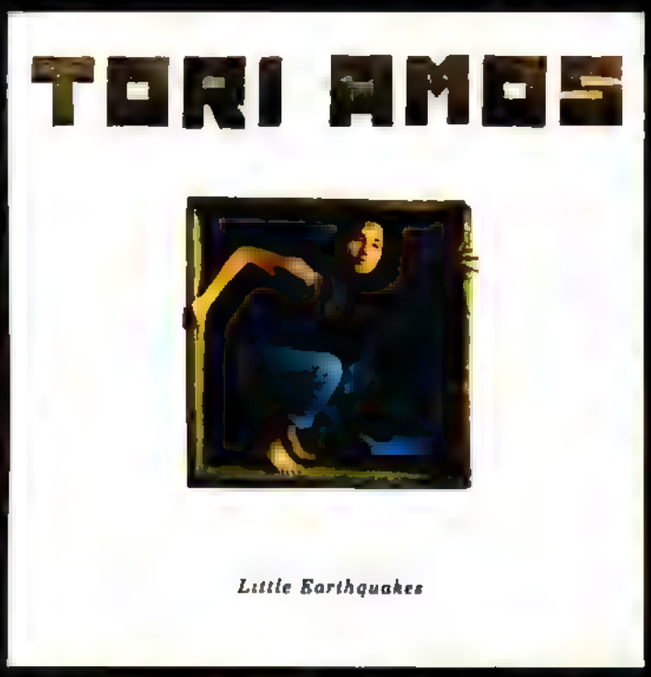
Rantz took it upon himself to send Neil some music that I had recorded, demos from *Little Earthquakes*— not the full record, but portions, very early stuff. So he sent it to Neil without me knowing, and I got a phone call from Neil in London in 1991, and he said, "Hi, I'm Neil! And this person Rantz sent me this music and I just wanted to encourage you, because I think you should maybe think about doing it as a career." And I said, "That's good because *Little Earthquakes* is coming out in a few months!"

So around the time of the *Me and a Gun EP*, he called me just months before it was being released and came to one of the early shows where I was just gigging in London alone at a keyboard.

SPOTLIGHT: Wow! He attended one of those early UK shows you did? Those were some historic performantes!

TORI: It was pretty trippy. Neil showed up at this place, some brasserie where I was playing — it happened to be a birthday party, and how I ended up playing a birthday party, talk about strange! And there Neil walks in, in his leather jacket, and looks at me as people are trying to make toasts and cut their cake and here I am singing "Crucify" and it's just a moment...*(Laughter.)* He just sat there, where he and the press woman from East/West Records were the only ones listening in this whole room full of people! And they just kind of pulled up their chairs kind of close to me, they were the only two people watching me play!

NEIL REFERENCES IN TORI AMOS SONGS



Tori has never been shy about name dropping her pal Neil in her songs. Here's a short list of Neil references:

1) "If you need me, me and Neil'll be hangin' out with the dream king / Neil said hi, by the way"

"Tear In Your Hand," from the album *Little Earthquakes*, 1992. Tori having a little fun with Neil and Morpheus from *Sandman*.

2) "Where's Neil when you need him?"

"Space Dog," from the album *Under the Pink*, 1994. Tori asks the classic question!

3) "Will you find me if Neil makes me a tree?"

"Horses," from the album *Boys For Pele*, 1996.

4) "Where are the Velvets?"

"Hotel," from the album From the Choirgirl Hotel, 1998. Reference inspired by characters from Neil's novel *Neverwhere*.

5) "Get me Neil on the line/Have him read *Snow, Glass, Apples*"

"Carbon," from the album Scarlet's Walk, 2002. *Snow, Glass Apples* is the name of a play written by Neil.

He took me out afterwards just for a bite to eat. We rode the tube and he said, "Listen, things are gonna get better. I really feel this. I've got a good feeling about this! *(Laughter.)* You won't have to sing "Crucify" at birthdays for the rest of your life!"

SPOTLIGHT: He slipped in and out of some of those shows like Morpheus, it sounds like, coming down from on high and passing on his wisdom to you.

TORI: Yes, he did! I think that his relationship with me has been as a spiritual brother. It's always been based on creativity and, I think, being a port in a storm. I'd like to think I've been the same thing for him. You know, where you're able to not be bought or swayed by the powers that be, and you're able to be a steady force for your creative buddy. And he's had to be very brave. He's had to really stand up to publishers and to be the creative force that he is.

SPOTLIGHT: And likewise, you have as well.

TORI: Yeah, and I think that's why there's always been a sort of a mirror image, maybe, I guess that's why he has always popped in. He visits the crew when we're on tour, he'll jump on the tour bus and he'll get a hotel room and hang out, and I think that I remember in the early years he would borrow things that I would say, and they would end up in Delirium. There would be a time where I wouldn't know if I was stealing from her, or she was stealing from me!

SPOTLIGHT: His influence on you comes full circle with your influence on him. He began to seed Delirium — one of the Endless in his landmark *Sandman* series — with inspiration from you. When you were reading these comics as they came out monthly, it must have been a trip for you!

TORI: I think that as it's happening, because it's your life, you're not only outside looking in — if that makes sense — because you have these conversations with this person and then you read something and you'd say, "Oh yeah, I think I remember us having this conversation!" Everything just felt like an extended part of a conversation that we were having at the time. The demands to turn in that material were quite high. He had to be very prolific. So he was always writing one of those issues. Every time I was talking to him he was in the middle of writing something. I think that as a creative force, sure you do flirt with things that your friends say, and all of a sudden they become things that your characters say. I think that's just kind of normal.

SPOTLIGHT: For the average comic reader, the dialogue is basically words on a page that you read and you have that outside looking in relationship, but for you, you're almost part of the narrative! Your experience is there on the page; it is recovered memory disguised as fiction. Hanging out with Neil will do that to you, huh?

TORI: The thing about Neil is that you really want to pump him for information if you can. If you ever get to sit down and talk to him, just start — if there's anything you really want to know about a mythological character, then he will know some anecdote about it. I really believe that his coding — as in the codes within his makeup — he's like a library for that information, and if you go on the internet and start typing in these mythological people, it's not the same. He has sifted through thousands and thousands and thousands of pages, it seems, of this stuff, and has thrown out what doesn't hold up, meaning the stuff that seems to be disproved after you've read enough. You say, "Oh no, that's not really Balder's story," or, "That's not really true about Freya," and what I found was because I was really

trying to contain more myth in my work, he was a mentor for me in those early years. I began to see his process and I think it gave my little Mini a jumpstart. Or Mustang, really...he'd be the Mini, and I'd be the Mustang. He has a Mini you know!

SPOTLIGHT: Oh, does he? Neil Gaiman, a Mini Cooper guy? We've been looking for a big scoop on the guy...

TORI: Yeah, he has a Mini! And I had a wannabe Mustang in the old days. *(Laughter.)* I was brought up in a religious household, so the Four Horses of the Apocalypse and all that, that was part of my upbringing: the Biblical. But I think his archetypal influence was across the board, and mine was more Native American and the Bible. And I think that, at a certain point, you can plunder your own...what would you call it... what makes you *you*, and what you're brought up in...and sometimes you're thirsty for other cultures and their stories, and in our chats, he would always remind me how important myth was. That it's the clue to everything.

SPOTLIGHT: Have you heard anything about his new project with Marvel, *The Eternals*?

TORI: No.

SPOTLIGHT: It's precisely about mythology. It's based on a 1970s comic by one of the all time legends of comics, Jack Kirby, and he tried to tie together all of mankind's myths from all the different regions of the world as being put in play by an actual race of people called the Eternals. They lived on a mountaintop and they ran around the world doing all kinds of funky stuff, and they are the ones who inspired all the different myths. What Neil is doing is modernizing Jack Kirby's idea and putting his own spin on it, contextualizing all the mythology that

WHERE'S NEIL WHEN YOU NEED HIM?

My answer to that question has always been, "Why, Neil's on my bookshelf!" Now, thanks to a new release from Dancing Ferret Records, I'll be able to find Neil in my cd player...when I need him, of course! Hitting your finer music emporiums on July 18, *Where's Neil When You Need Him?* is a 17-track compilation of brand new recordings by ardent fans of Neil Gaiman and his writing. Tori Amos leads the charge with a remastered version of her *Sandman*-influenced song, "Sister Named Desire," but there are also tracks from top international acts like Rasputina, The Cruxshadows, Theo Gilmore and Future Bible Heroes. We caught up with the executive producer of the record, Dancing Ferret's Patrick Rodgers, and he gave us the scoop on Neil's tribute from his fans!

SPOTLIGHT: Even though he has written music before, Neil Gaiman isn't necessarily connected with music in the minds of the public, so how does a concept like this even come together? Who's inspiration was it?

PATRICK: The concept for the disc comes from a business philosophy that's very important to us. In addition to the traditional methods that can be used to help a band increase its fan base and connect with more people, our label tries to assemble innovative projects that use music to explore other themes or concepts. For example, we previously released a "soundtrack" to a popular board game, as well as a disc of medieval music that was released in conjunction with one of the country's largest Renaissance Faires.

The idea of presenting a collection of new music that was inspired by one author was something we'd kicked around for awhile. Shakespeare was actually an early favorite, but in the end, we thought there was a much stronger emotional connection to Neil's work (and Shakespeare's people told us he was not going to be available to write liner notes). The fact that Neil's work has such a wide range to it was also a big factor, as that gave us a greater degree of freedom to be more eclectic with the musical selection. We work with artists who put a lot of themselves into their music, and who create art that is not necessarily designed to be homogenous and well-suited for mass consumption. Neil approaches his work in the same way, so it seemed like an ideal coupling.

SPOTLIGHT: How closely did Neil work on this project? Did he have final say on artists and songs?

PATRICK: Neil was involved from the very beginning of the project and had approval power on all of the music. He gave us a short list of artists that he really wanted to see on the disc, and that starting point definitely influenced the direction of the record. We were very mindful of not going too far in any one direction musically, as we really wanted the disc to reflect the diversity of Neil's work and his fan base. Once Neil had listened to all of the music, we discussed the order in which the tracks would appear and Neil set to work on the liner notes. He wrote about the project in general and then discussed each song as well. He's been great fun to work with and has been extremely supportive of the project.

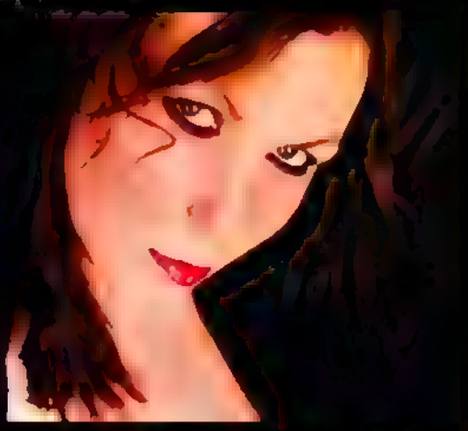
SPOTLIGHT: Tell me a little about your label, Dancing Ferret.

PATRICK: Our label is an offshoot of Dancing Ferret Concerts, which started in 1995 to promote live shows and club events here in Philadelphia. The Dancing Ferret Discs label started up a few years later and has become the central focus of our business. We specialize in various styles of alternative music, and about half of our artist roster comes from overseas. In particular, we work with a lot of bands from Germany, and you can see that connection reflected in the Gaiman CD (there are three German Top 40 acts on the disc). The European market has also been very receptive to our US acts. About one third of our sales are in Europe.

A few years ago, we started a sub label, Noir Records, to focus on trip-hop, ethereal and medieval music. The medieval music has become a very hot item for us and has brought us a lot of attention recently. We're now being touted as the leading US label for medieval music, which is very gratifying.

Marvel Spotlight had the chance to speak to a couple other recording artists involved in *Where's Neil When You Need Him?* Here is Thea Gilmore and Future Bible Heroes take on Neil and the new CD!

THEA GILMORE, "Even Gods Do"



"British singer/songwriter Thea Gilmore captures the trials and tribulations of Shadow in *American Gods* with this wistful ballad. Thea's work has a great folk quality to it, which helps emphasize Shadow's humanity and vulnerability."

— excerpt from Neil's liner notes

SPOTLIGHT: Thea, what's your estimation of Neil's work and his writing talent?

THEA: I think Neil's imagination and characterization is second to none. He has a pretty unique way of looking at the world and it always comes across in his writing. When I was a kid I was brought up to have a healthy respect for the inexplicable, my mother in particular, made me believe in magic (not Harry Potter stuff, real, natural, primeval forces) and when I read Neil's work, he's one of the few people I think looks at the world in the same way.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you first come across Neil's work?

THEA: It would have been *Sandman* stuff. I remember being eleven and hearing Tori Amos sing about him on the *Little Earthquakes* album and being intrigued as to what sort of person could inspire more than one song check in the space of an hour!

SPOTLIGHT: What went into the writing of your song that appears on the Neil tribute cd, "Even Gods Do"?

THEA: I wanted to write a song that tried to make you visualize Shadow as much as the novel did. Unusually for me, I concentrated more on making the music ebb and flow to create the mood than the lyrics. I consider myself to be a very lyric based artist, but when writing about Shadow, he didn't need clever poetry to describe him, he needed minor keys and mood music!

SPOTLIGHT: So, where is Neil when you need him?

THEA: Luckily for me, usually on the other end of an e-mail... or possibly booting round Chicago in his Mini (the last time I saw him!)

relates to the Eternals and making it sort of real in the understanding of our world.

TORI: Well how timely is that! You know, Joseph Campbell — Neil and I would talk about this a lot — what a great mind he was, a force. However, the generation now isn't necessarily exposed to Joseph Campbell, and how do you combat forces — political forces, say — that are making decisions that we are going to have to live with over the next twenty years and longer? How do you find, maybe, the answers to equations — political equations, or emotional equations — unless you know your mythology? Because it's really hard to think like, well, "I only know what's happening to me in my time, not how wars have happened in other times." I think that Neil is a clever egg in that he knows that a way to arm a generation is to give them ways to really fight powers that are trying to keep generations in the dark. And that might seem — I'm not giving you an *Alias* kind of chat, here; the idea that it's an "us against them" kind of thing — but I do think that because a lot of information has been controlled, not by burning books but by certain things being kep unavailable, and how so much of communication as you know is controlled by those who are "they," there are ways you have to be able to slip through the net.

We would talk quite a bit that the best thing that one can do is to try and arm an individual with little windows that they can jump through, and then they can piece together their own mosaic. They can find their own myth, and so the fragments of self become whole. And when you're dealing with a generation who are whole, like the power of the late 60s generation, how they confronted those in power and held their feet to the fire, it was a very powerful time! And as we both know — Bob Dylan and John Lennon, those guys weren't dumb bunnies. I think when you ask, "Who is the Bob Dylan of this generation?", well, that's a big, big, big question mark. We certainly need them. And yet, maybe you have to put the information out there that's not going to look the same, and it *can't be* the same, but Neil knows enough to know that comics books are something that people are going to pick up. And so he's going to arm anybody with what they need if they want to, I don't know...stretch! To step into bigger shoes!

SPOTLIGHT: Well, that's part of what *Eternals* is going to be all about. You sound like you've got a good read on it already!

"I remember in the early years he would borrow things that I would say, and they would end up in Delirium. There would be a time where I wouldn't know if I was stealing from her, or she was stealing from me!"

TORI: It's funny, because when *The Da Vinci Code* came out, he did say to me — and this is nothing against anybody that's involved in it — but he said to me, "This information has been out there for quite some time." And yet, because very few people have read Elaine Pagels or even read *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, then this was a big shock for them. And I think that he is trying to bring to the masses, a lot more of not just that kind of information, but information that has just not been out in the mainstream, if you see what I mean. And I really find that very exciting in his work. He loads it...it's loaded. *Stardust*, it's just loaded with research. When he works on a book, sometimes he'll crash at one of my houses, and the amount of effort that he puts into a work, it's enough to make you want to burn the midnight oil yourself. You really understand about discipline, and it doesn't always come easy. It really doesn't. I have a library in the beach house and he'll pull books out from the shelf — they're everywhere! I'm not saying he's a messy house guest, but...*(Laughter.)* I'm saying, you know, he will really push himself, which makes you as a creative force want to push yourself.

I'm bragging on his work ethic, his research. I think a lot of times, you and I both know, you've got one comic in you, or one good record if you're half good. But book after book after book...that's a very different thing.

SPOTLIGHT: He's got a big arsenal to work with. You just mentioned the hard work involved in discriminating research; but also, Neil's gift of characterization is lethal. He can draw a character out within a few pages of a comic, and with just a key lines of dialogue make you know that character eternally...endlessly, even! (Puns intended!)

TORI: Yeah, but this goes back to the discipline of observation. All those walks that we'll take, or times on the tube, or just sitting there having dinner, we can't not observe. I think that as a writer, you're the nosiest person that has ever lived (and it's so embarrassing to admit that), but you have to be an observer of other people. Otherwise, you can't develop your characters because if you're only developing them around your friends soon you're not going to have any, number one. And number two, you're going to repeat yourself over and over. But the best characters are based on truth. Most of what Neil writes from what I know, it's based on what he really sees; maybe, you know, a little bit of this, a little bit of that, a pinch of this and a pinch of that, from this creature or that creature, but I think that he is trying to remind me when I'm writing a work about the research and observation, and to push yourself further. You know, to really push yourself. Every line, every sentence, every beat of every bar.

And also, if you're smart, everybody has a think tank. He has his and I have mine, and he's obviously a part of mine, and I guess I'm a part of his, but how it works is that when he's working on something, he'll send me it, and we have a joke, which is: "Listen, I'd rather hear it from you than the *New York Times*," I mean, it's like, "Lay it on me, Neil!"

SPOTLIGHT: Right, it's all about who you can trust.

TORI: Yeah, because you cannot open your work up to everybody, because you will find enough people to hate it and enough people to love it. You need people who are going to offer something up.

SPOTLIGHT: To be real with it.

TORI: Sometimes he'll send me something and it's just not my cup of tea, but that doesn't mean that I can't sit there and respond. For some gory bloody scene, like the Corinthian for example (in *Sandman*), he might ask, "Is this effective in this way?" And I think that's the kind of

FUTURE BIBLE HEROES, "Mr. Punch"

"Demenito never sounded so good. It's twisted, it's bizarre, it's morbid, and it's absolutely wonderful. Just as with a good Punch and Judy show, there's something wicked to amuse the bad children and a bit of subtext for the bad adults, too."

— excerpt from Neil's liner notes

Band lineup: Claudia Gonson, Stephin Merritt, Chris Ewen

SPOTLIGHT: Chris, what's your estimation of Neil's work and his writing talent?

FBH: Neil's work is both timeless and modern at the same time. His engaging and complex characters, coupled with plots that seamlessly merge the fantastic with the mundane are a testament to his imagination and unique voice. Neil breathes new life into rich traditions, keeps the myths, legends and folklore of human experience alive and relevant, and creates new classics along the way. That is talent on the grandest scale.

SPOTLIGHT: How did you first come across Neil's work?

FBH: Unlike some, my first exposure to Neil was through his novels, not his comic and graphic novel work. A friend recommended *Neverwhere* to me when it came out. I bought it, read it, promptly ran out and bought everything I could find, and haven't looked back. Stephin's first exposure was the *Sandman* series.

SPOTLIGHT: What went into the writing of your song that appears on the Neil tribute cd, "Mr. Punch"?

FBH: Besides the book, it was having seen a *Punch & Judy* puppet show at a convention with Neil, as well as and our long standing love of fake British accents and the "chipmunk" song genre.

SPOTLIGHT: So, where is Neil when you need him?

FBH: I don't know how he manages it, but somehow Neil is always exactly where he needs to be when we need him. It may be because he has a GPS in his car.

"...when he's working on something, he'll send me it, and we have a joke, which is: 'Listen, I'd rather hear it from you than the New York Times.' I mean, it's like, 'Lay it on me, Neil!'"

think tank you need: not people who, if it's not rap, they hate it, or they just hate girl singers...if you're like that, you're just an absolutely useless person on a think tank, because you can only like what you like, you're completely nonobjective.

SPOTLIGHT: And the other way, too, is someone who unconditionally loves everything you do, they can't help push you places where you might need to go.

TORI: No, no, no...that's a waste of time. But not everybody has the ability to, you know, offer something up, and also not everybody wants to receive it when you do offer it up! But you realize that to be strong creative forces, you need a few people in your life that are going to give you what you need to be great.

SPOTLIGHT: And you guys are there for each other in that respect! Have the two of you ever considered doing something more directly collaborative in the future?

TORI: It's funny you would say this. I mean...*(Pause.)* We do chat about it. He has an idea. So he's been prodding me, which is good, because just because you might want to work together doesn't mean you should. So he's come up with an idea that has rattled my cage. In a good way! So you kick it around in a structural way. As a musical structure, you think, how could I do this...? So, yeah, I think it's there, and I think that our friendship is strong enough to survive it.

SPOTLIGHT: Whether it might be a success or a failure! Have you ever thought that perhaps you'd like to write a comic book one day? Do any of your artistic inspirations ever formulate around that medium at all?

TORI: Well...*(Long pause.)*... I think you would have to know what you're good at and what you're not. I go back to this saying: just because you might have an opportunity to do something, doesn't mean you should do it. I think you have to know what you're good at, and so I think I'll leave the comics to Neil. I want to read them!

Thank you, Tori, for sitting with this interview for Marvel Spotlight *readers! And to readers of* Marvel Spotlight, *be sure to check out Tori's new version of "Sister Named Desire," her contribution to the new Dave McKean produced tribute CD to Neil Gaiman titled* Where's Neil When You Need Him.

MARVEL 1602: NEW WORLD

1602: NEW WORLD is the follow-up to Neil Gaiman's smash hit limited series. Written by Greg Pak, of Planet Hulk fame, and illustrated by Greg Tocchini (Thor: Son of Asgard), it follows up the events set in play by the epic story told by Neil in 1602. Neil himself acted as creative consultant on this series, giving it a seamless continuity with the original story. *1602: New World* centers on the colony of Roanoke, where we last saw our heroes at the conclusion of Neil's story. As you may remember, Peter Parquagh and David Banner were each caught in strangely familiar accidents, and it should come as no surprise that these accidents have had some very interesting ramifications. Banner came to the colonies in the service of King James of England, charged with hunting down and killing Sir Nicholas Fury, deemed a traitor to the crown. But he now awakens to find his clothes shredded and no clear memory of what he has done. Peter Parquagh is in the service of broadsheet publisher Jonah Jameson, and has become an integral part of the Roanoke colony, forming a budding friendship with young Virginia Dare. Another colonist, Norman Osborne, harbors a secret agenda, seeking to stir up hatred against their Native American neighbors. And back in England, an angry King James dispatches a Spanish warrior clad in red and gold armor to bring the wayward Banner back to account. All of these competing factions reach an explosive confrontation in this riveting sequel. You can read all about it in the *1602: New World* trade paperback, on sale now!

ETERNALS #1 VARIANT COVER: A stunning take on Sersi by artist Olivier Coipel!

JACK KIRBY AN

Kirby was coming…back!

After a five year hiatus, Jack Kirby was returning to Marvel Comics in 1975. Similar to his just-ended contract with DC Comics, the King would write, pencil and edit a line of comics from his California home. At this point in his illustrious career, Kirby had big ideas still waiting to make it onto the page and as a result, he didn't want to repeat himself. Still, publisher Stan Lee and then-Editor-in-Chief Roy Thomas wanted Kirby's energy to infuse some of the core titles. Reluctantly, Kirby returned to *Captain America* and helped relaunch the *Black Panther*. His imagination could not be earthbound so he agreed to adapt the movie *2001: A Space Odyssey* which led to an ongoing title, which begat the popular character Machine Man.

Kirby wasn't done, though.

Always captivated by the notion of legends, he thought heroic legends were created by people who needed something to look up to, to ease their suffering since so much of man's early history was a struggle. A Viking would come back from a battle, feeling tired and covered in blood, but he knew atop the mountain, Thor was still fighting the good fight. Such notions influenced much of his work dating back to Captain America, addressing a far more modern need.

Ever since his tenure on *Thor* in the 1960s, Kirby liked the notion of aliens being perceived by humans as gods. Now back at Marvel, he still wanted to explore the theme. The timing was fortuitous given Erich von Däniken's best-selling book *Chariot of the Gods?* which discussed the idea that aliens had visited Earth in the distant past, influencing ancient cultures, including the Mayans. Marvel thought the idea had merit, as they had already jumped on that bandwagon with the first issue of *Marvel Preview* in 1975.

Kirby was given the green light to produce The Celestials. As Kirby set to work, it was decided to rename the title Return of the Gods in order to cement the relationship in consumers' minds. A logo had been created which was even used in several house ads before the Legal Department stepped in and had it removed. They felt the type treatment was close to an infringement so the final title became The Eternals.

The first issue arrived cover-dated July 1976 and continued for nineteen issues and one annual, one of the longer runs for a Kirby creation that decade. In an introductory text piece, Kirby wrote, "How do we view the Eternals?

"That is the question. And it's a big question, because it involves us all in a great cosmic adventure which began when the dinosaurs split the scene and humanity was first pushed on the stage of that universal Gong Show we call History.

"Something happened back there, among the steaming ferns and moving continents of prehistoric Earth. And neither Walter Cronkite nor Howard Cosell nor your ever-lovin' current events teacher was there to take notes on the events we must nowadays sift from the myths, the mummies, and the skeletons that lay buried beneath tons of soil.

"So what happened there, in that unreported, unwritten, mystifying beginning of all things? How many mammoth events provided the oil which still spins the wheels of this plastic pickle-works we hail as modern civilization?

"I feel that playing around with this sort of conjecture is highly entertaining, and that we should aim our gun sights at this giant puzzle we've inherited more often. We can't leave it all to the professors, pundits, and paperback prophets. The puzzle belongs to you and me as well."

In the telling, Kirby postulated that a race known as the Celestials had come to Earth during the early days of life. These titanic, armored figures came from the far reaches of the cosmos to various planets to weigh and measure life as it was developing. Their studies occur over

THE WONDER OF KIRBY: Human archaeologists stumble onto evidence of the space gods in this two-page spread from Jack Kirby's *Eternals* #1.

D THE ETERNALS

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

countless years in four visits with different delegations, known as Hosts. The First Host arrived on Earth about one million years ago and began their experiments with the humanoids found at that time. As a result, two new species were created: Eternal and Deviant.

The Eternals were given superior genetics, imbued with cosmic energies that took centuries to discover and master. The Deviants, on the other hand, were given an unstable genetic code which caused them to mutate over the years.

The Second Host arrived some 20,000 years back when the Deviants had managed to forge a worldwide government—based in Lemuria—crushing any human resistance. During one such attack, the city of Atlantis sank. In their hubris, they thought to challenge their creators. The Celestials had other ideas and much of the Deviant civilization was eradicated during the Great Cataclysm, including the sinking of the continent of Mu, and man was left to evolve on his own.

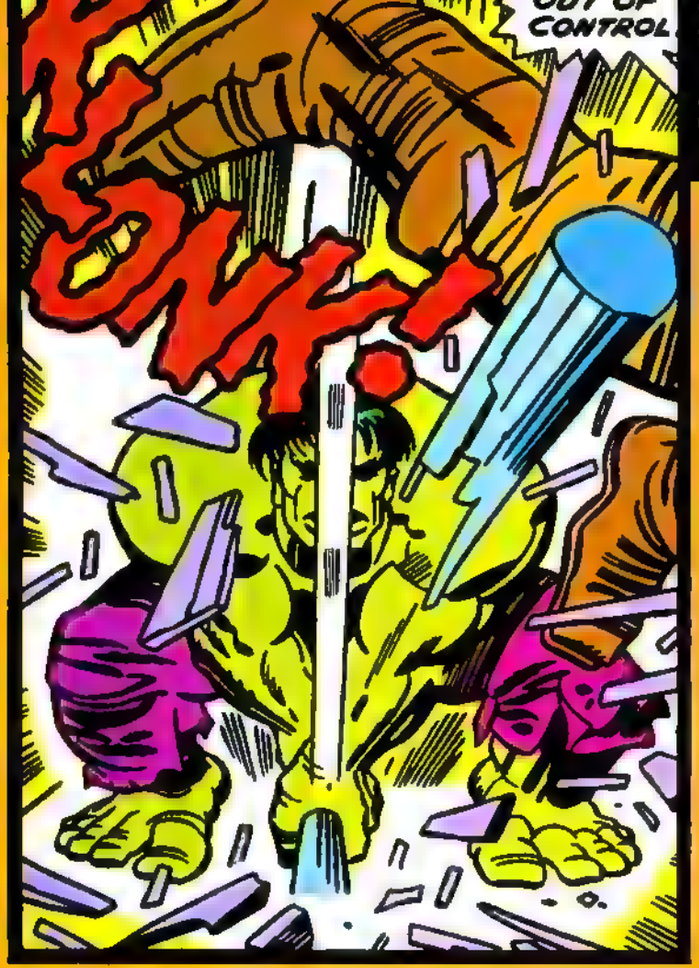
The Eternals kept to themselves in their polar retreat, recognizing their advanced abilities would frighten the humans. Among them, one stood out, having fought brave battles but then was shunned by man and even Eternal, earning the title the Forgotten One. There were other periodic exchanges between Eternal and human, such as the Eternal later named Ikaris marrying a human woman and having a son, Icarus. When the son died, Ikaris adopted the name in tribute. Best known are the exploits of Sersi, the bombastic woman who enjoyed dealing with man and his culture. She frequently walked through man's world, savoring hedonistic pleasures, notably dancing.

They were nobly led by Kronos until his death when the son, Zuras, succeeded him. Zuras was the Prime Eternal until the arrival of the Fourth Host and is noted for being the first to combine all the Eternals into the Uni-Mind. Zuras perfected the Ritual that brings just about all Eternals together so their cosmic energy can be merged into a brain-like construct. Much remains to be learned about the Uni-Mind but it has been formed only during times of great crisis, requiring a unified effort. The records indicate humans and Deviants have also been tapped to help form the Uni-Mind which showed its adaptability.

About 1000 B.C. heralded the Third Host, their duties described by the Eternal Ajak as "inspection and cultivation." The Incas worshipped the visiting Host as gods while instilling fear in others around the globe. The Eternal Ajak spoke directly with the Celestials, protecting their base, and then placed himself in suspended animation, awaiting the Fourth Host.

MAKE YOUR RUN, MAKARRI! THERE'S A GROUP OF THE ENEMY DIRECTLY BELOW US AND I WANT A WELL-PLACED THROW!
YOU SMALL HAVE IT, THENA! OUR COMBINED SKILLS HAVE WROUGHT HAVOC WITH THE DEVIANTS THIS NIGHT!!

THENA AND MAKARRI: Two of Kirby's Eternals who were built for action, on the hunt for Deviants terrorizing New York City! (From Jack Kirby's Eternals #6.)



ROBOT HULK SMASH! Despite editorial mandates, Jack couldn't bring himself to rotate real Marvel characters into his Eternals book, so he compromised by making his Hulk a cosmically-powered robot replica! (From *Eternals* #14.)

In the nineteenth century, the Eternal Ikaris sensed it was time to prepare Earth for the Host's arrival and left his home to interact with man. Using the name Ike Harris, Ikaris dealt with humans for the first time since the Third Host and marveled at the changes.

The Fourth Host came to Earth in the recent past, ready to render judgment–the setting for Kirby's run. They witness what man had wrought, as well as the resumption of the ages-old conflict between Eternal and Deviant. The Deviants sought to either gain favor with the Host or see to it no one benefited. The Eternals, meanwhile, sought to preserve not only their lives but that of the noble, less powerful humans, whom they saw as having great potential. A small group, known as the Young Gods, made a gift of themselves to the Celestials to show how well the experiment had worked. Arishem, leader of the Fourth Host, accepted them and gave Earth his verdict: a thumbs-up.

Sales were solid but never spectacular. Looking back, historians Gerry Jones & Will Jacobs called it "great fun" while Peter Sanderson in *Marvel Universe* called it Kirby's last great creative achievement. He wrote: "Like much of Kirby's work for Marvel and DC in the 1960s and 1970s, *The Eternals* is an inquiry into the nature of God. Working with Lee, Kirby had created the Stranger *(in X-Men)*, Odin and the High Evolutionary *(in Thor)*, the Source *(in New Gods)*, the Watcher and Galactus (in *The Fantastic Four*); now, working on his own in *The Eternals*, he presented us with 'space gods,' the Celestials.

"The Eternals is as memorable for its characters as it is for Kirby's epic feats of visualization. There was the shadowy, brooding figure of the Forgotten One, the Eternal who was known to ancient civilizations as Gilgamesh, Samson, and Hercules. There was Kro, the demonic military leaders of the Deviants, who despite his ruthlessness was still gripped by passion for his former lover, Thena, the fiery warrior daughter of Zuras, monarch of the Eternals. And there was Sersi, perhaps the most fascinating of all, an Eternal with many sides to her personality. She was known to the Deviants as Sersi the Terrible for her temper and her ability to alter the shapes of persons or objects at will, as when she transformed Ulysses' men to pigs in ancient times. (Sersi explained that Homer had misspelled her name in *The Odyssey*.)

"Despite its considerable merits, the original *Eternals* series was not a commercial success, perhaps because Kirby dealt with his large cast of characters as a true ensemble, continually shifting the focus from one group in one issue to another set in the next; there was no central heroic figure who appeared in every story line."

While most comics of the day focused on one or two main characters, even the team books such as The *Avengers* and *X-Men* kept the focus tight on a handful of protagonists and gently shifting that focus over the course of issues. Not Kirby, whose kinetic storytelling meant readers were treated to a rush of concepts, one coming after the after with little time spent fully exploring any one character or concept. As a result, his titles tended to either be embraced by fans who loved the art and energy or shunned by those who were left breathless.

Ray Wyman Jr., in *The Art of Jack Kirby*, suggested, "Although the story writing in *Eternals* was fragmented and distracting, Kirby's pseudo-techno designs were as fascinating as ever."

In Kirby's mind, his space saga was in its own reality, divorced from the Marvel Universe. By 1977, though, editors back in New York wanted to play with his concepts and thought the book would benefit from the familiar super heroes and super-villains making appearances. Kirby, by then, was already battling with editors over the way his dialogue had been altered without approval in his various titles. In an effort to be one of the gang, he made a few attempts to acknowledge the Marvel

DON'T FEAR THE REJECT! Well, unless you're a Deviant! *Eternals* #9 is a thrill-packed issue featuring the Reject, a progeny of the Deviants that is loathed solely for his appearance, and his gladiatorial challenger, the behemoth known as Karkas

Universe in his cosmic series. S.H.I.E.L.D. agents began to show up followed by one of his earliest hits, The Thing – however, the blue-eyed adventurer proved to be a regular Joe whose features were momentarily transformed into a likeness of the Fantastic Four hero by Sersi. Another attempt had an appearance by The Hulk, but this too proved to be a falsity – this one was a cosmically-enhanced robot.

After 1978 Kirby stopped the title, and the characters were fair game to the next generation of editors, writers and artists, many of whom were strongly influenced by Kirby's creations and were eager to play with them.

But none of the series featuring these entities has proven successful, a track record likely to change with 2006's miniseries from Neil Gaiman and John Romita, Jr. When the announcement was made, Gaiman said, "What drew me to it was not the god side of things, but the incredibly long-lived nature of things. I just loved the idea of seeing two people standing in a town square looking at a statue of themselves that was erected 1,000 years before.

"It was kind of the opportunity to create a mythology. In *1602* I re-created everything that had happened in the Marvel Universe because they'd got it right. *The Eternals* still had that amazing Jack Kirby outpouring of ideas, and there were some amazing things. But he didn't get it right. It's sort of weird and lumpy.

JACK KIRBY'S ETERNALS: This splash page from *Eternals #6* shows off a few of the cast members Jack had assembled: from left to right, Makarri, Thena, the Deviant Lord Kro, Sersi, the human Margo Damien, and Ikaris.

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT

SALVADOR LARROCA • OFFICIAL HANDBOOK

REAL NAME: Salvador Larroca Martinez
DATE OF BIRTH: July 28, 1964
PLACE OF BIRTH/RESIDENCE: Valencia, Spain
OCCUPATION: Comic book artist
WEBSITE: No website currently online
FIRST MARVEL COMICS APPEARANCE: *Incredible Hulk Annual #20*, cover, 1994

HISTORY: Salvador Larroca was born and raised in Valencia, Spain, and after his high schooling was completed, his first employment was as a cartographer, making maps of geographic regions all over the world. If Salvador had been inspired to make a map of all the charted regions of his life at that time, he would never have thought to include a career in comic art! For one such as he, an artist in Spain, the odds of landing a job in the more lucrative and popular American comics market was unthinkable. But in doing art for a series of posters for a company associated with Marvel, he caught the attention of Marvel UK, who offered him work. His early jobs on *Death's Head II* and *Dark Angel* showed much promise, and soon the opportunity to work on Marvel's American titles came to him.

It must have been a bewildering time for Salva, as within a short time, he had scored a regular gig on *Ghost Rider*. Unlike many of his peers, Salva was incredibly dedicated to delivering work on time, and could also be counted on to do multiple comics in a month, which kept his dance card filled with mini-series, covers, and one-shots to go along with his regular titles. After *Ghost Rider* wrapped up, he went to an A-list comic, working alongside one of his favorite writers, Chris Claremont, on *Fantastic Four*.

Since the turn of the century, however, no artist has been more popularly associated with the X-Men than Salva. He has drawn prolific amounts of mutant tales across *Uncanny X-Men*, *X-Men* and *X-Treme X-Men* since the year 2000. One look at the following checklists will show you just how prolific Salva has been! And his popularity as a reliable and talented artist continues as he leaves the X-Men Universe in 2006 to spend time aiding writer Warren Ellis in reconstructing the New Universe, and draws a special one-shot in which Marvel legend Stan Lee meets Dr. Doom!

THE SALVADOR LARROCA MARVEL COMICS LIBRARY:
Cable #24 (1995)
Dark Angel #11-16 (Marvel UK, 1993)
Death's Head II #12-15 (1993)
Excalibur #107-110 (1997)
Fantastic Four #4-34 (1998-2000)
Fantastic Four 2000
Gambit & the X-Ternals #3-4 (1995)
Generation X/Gen 13 (1997)
Ghost Rider #51-81 (1994-97)
Heroes Reborn: The Return #1-4 (1997)
House of M: Spider-Man #1-5 (2005)
Iron Man #15 (1999)
Marvel Spotlight: Neil Gaiman/Salvador Larroca (2006)
Namor #1-6 (2003)
New X-Men #155-156 (2004)
Psylocke & Archangel: Crimson Dawn #1-4 (1997)
Speed Demon #1 (Amalgam, 1996)
Ultimate Daredevil & Elektra #1-4 (2003)
Ultimate Elektra #1-5 (2004)
Uncanny X-Men #338, 387-392, 437-443 (1996, 2000-01, 2004)
X-Men #69, 80, 157-179, 182-186 (1998, 2004-06)
X-Men Unlimited #36 (2001)
X-Treme X-Men #1-24 (2001-03)
X-Treme X-Men 2001

COVERS/PIN-UPS COLLECTION:
Age of Apocalypse: The Chosen (pin-ups)
Astonishing X-Men #1 Director's Cut
Double Edge: Alpha Flight #1 (pin-up)
Gambit #24 (cover)
Hawkeye #8 (cover)
Heroes #1
House of M #7 (variant cover)
Hulk Annual #20 (cover)
Namor #7, 9 (covers)
Spider-Man Unlimited #9, 12
X-Men #180-181
X-Men: Declassified #1
X-Treme X-Men #25-46

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X-Men: Dream's End TPB
X-Men: Eve of Destruction TPB
X-Men: Day of the Atom TPB
X-Men: Golgotha TPB
X-Men: Bizarre Love Triangle TPB
X-Men/Black Panther TPB
X-Men: The Day After TPB
X-Men: Blood of Apocalypse TPB
X-Treme X-Men Vol. 1: Destiny TPB
X-Treme X-Men Vol. 2: Invasion TPB
X-Treme X-Men Vol. 3: Schism TPB
X-Treme X-Men Vol. 4: Mekanix TPB

THE SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW WITH SALVADOR LARROCA

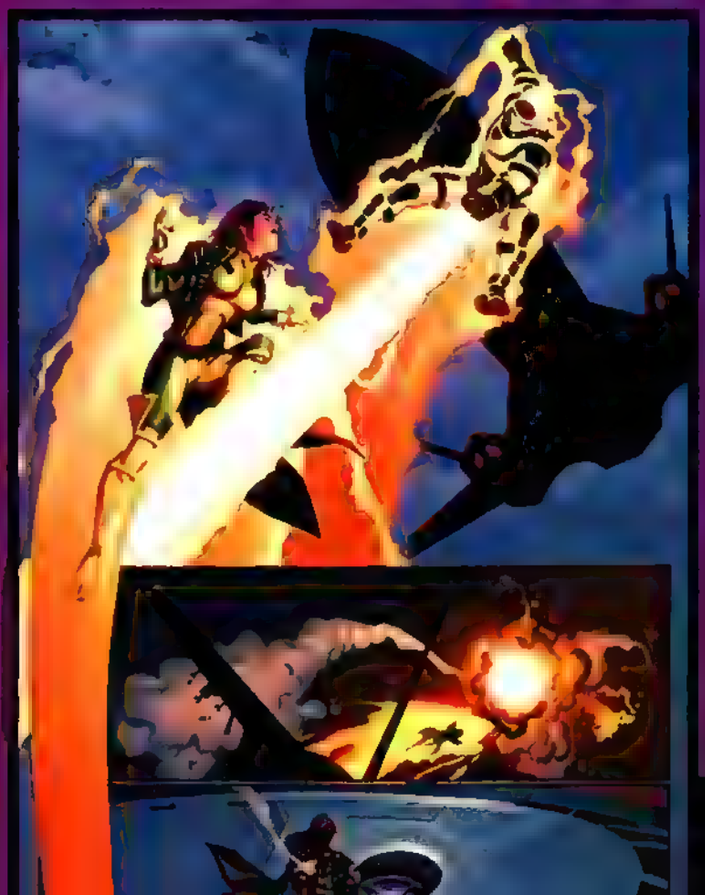
The great thing about Salvador Larroca's art is that it translates to anyone who looks at it, and whether they speak English, Spanish or Mandarin Chinese, his clean, crisp and tasteful comic art makes perfect sense! But Salva — as he is informally known — has often been shy about giving interviews because he worries about communication difficulties with those who speak English (meaning your humble *Spotlight* correspondent!) Thus, we drafted a translator from Spain, a Mighty Marvel Maven by the name of Eduardo Lopez, to make sure this interview went down without a hitch. So we are very excited to present to you a comprehensive, in-depth interview with Salva about his life, his art, the X-Men and more! We think you'll find it to be a lot of fun, so keep reading, señor!

SPOTLIGHT: In talking with French comic artist Olivier Coipel in a previous issue of *Spotlight*, he spoke of feeling like he was alone in finding a love for American comics. When did you start to become a fan of American superhero comics, and were you also not able to share your enthusiasm with other kids? Or were there lots of people you knew who were readers of comics?

SALVA: To tell the truth, I feel identified with Olivier's comments. I discovered Marvel comics as a kid. Back then, Marvel comics were hard to find. Perhaps you found one, and in order to get the next issue you had to really try hard. They didn't come out regularly, they weren't well published, they were in black and white, and as the format was smaller than the American format, whole panels were taken out which then formed new pages with touched up drawings...things that nowadays are unthinkable, but back then the fans didn't mind. We were crazy about these comics. As an adult man, I have known other cases like mine, but back then I felt slightly alone, like "Gollum with his treasure."

SPOTLIGHT: What were some of your favorite comic books from when you were a kid?

SALVA: The first Marvel comic I held was an *Iron Man* issue: "The Attack of the Mandarin" or something like that, then I bought all the Marvel comics I could with the small weekly allowance my parents gave me. To tell the truth, there wasn't much I could do with that small amount, I spent it on comics and nothing else. Then came Spider-man and the X-Men. With John Byrne on *X-Men*, I decided that I wanted to draw comics too, but even in my wildest dreams could I imagine the possibility of inheriting those characters someday. It just never crossed my mind.



ROGUE VS. FAMINE: The X-Men's Rogue takes on one of Apocalypse's Horsemen in this spectacularly conceived artwork from *X-Men* #184.

SPOTLIGHT: You did not start out as a comic book artist, but as a cartographer, which is a maker of maps. Can you tell us how that interesting career came to be?

SALVA: I always liked architecture, I studied delineation, and my teachers foresaw a brilliant career for me as an architect. I was a good student and I designed more or less well... unfortunately, for familiar reasons, I had to stop studying and begin working. Finally, I ended up at a studio dedicated to digital cartography where I won a position as head of the section of map digitalization.

Basically it consisted on making corrections and to make sure that all the information given by the aerial photos was well interpreted and that it adjusted to reality. Once this was done, the next step was to edit the maps. If you buy any street map of any city you will see an approximation of what we did, but this had much more information for the city halls, etc.

It was then when they called me from Marvel England, I never doubted for a second, I left all to dedicate myself fulltime to draw English superheroes, specifically *Dark Angel* and also *Death's Head*.

SPOTLIGHT: You have been drawing comics professionally for many years, since the early 1990s. What do you think of your early comics work as a professional?

SALVA: I'd better not say it, because it almost seems a miracle I got the job!

SPOTLIGHT: When did you feel like you had matured to a level of artistic craft that you were satisfied with?

SALVA: I think that day hasn't arrived yet... and it won't arrive. Usually when I do a page, after a couple of days I stop liking it and I begin finding mistakes. I know that what I'm doing now is better than what I did back then — although some fans don't think so *(Laughter.)* — but that's a small comfort. I am a very non-conformist guy, and that compels me now and then to change my usual style. More shadows, less shadows, no shadows, etc... I am a little hard on myself, that's the truth.

SPOTLIGHT: Two comics that you drew extensively for many years were *Ghost Rider* and *Fantastic Four*. It has been many years since you drew those comics, but do you think you might be interested in one day drawing them again?

SALVA: Of course I do! With the *FF*, I had the feeling of not giving the best of me. I think I was in a phase of artistic transition, between two styles (the one I had had until then, which was more manga, and the one I wanted, which was more realistic) and when I look at it nowadays I don't see either of them.

ULTIMATE ELEKTRA: Marvel couldn't have picked a better artist than Salva to portray the romantic, sensual side of Daredevil and Elektra. (From the cover to *Ultimate Elektra #4.*)

With *Ghost Rider* it's a different feeling, which is that back then I was learning to draw. I think he's a character that needs a very dark style, and I didn't have it back then, though I tried to develop it and I did it as best as I could. Although generally speaking there are some issues that are more or less all right, I don't think the bar was very high, although back then I compensated with more enthusiasm than technique.

SPOTLIGHT: What was your favorite thing about drawing *Ghost Rider*? He has a really cool visual look, but he also has all the cool motorcycles!

SALVA: Yes, he's a very visual and dark character. To tell the truth, the look he has on the movie trailer is impressive. In my head I always saw him like this, but when you are starting, you can't always draw exactly what you want, but something similar instead. Lately, I have seen some artists that have done great work with him. To tell the truth what I liked most about that character was the Rider himself in action. There were things in the background of the characters that didn't seem right to me, but that's just my opinion. Perhaps a different approach would have made him more interesting, as he's one of those second string characters that Marvel has, but that everybody knows.

SPOTLIGHT: As a working comics artist, what are some of the big differences between the old Marvel from the 1990s and the Marvel of today?

SALVA: When I arrived at Marvel, it was the period in which Jim Lee and the rest had just left Marvel, sales numbers were still very high, and comics that sold around 200,000 copies got cancelled. There was lots of leeway and they published things that nowadays couldn't be published. Today everything is more measured, there's almost no room for risks.

The functions of the editor have also changed. Now they are more limited, and they also hear me out more, I don't know if that is because now usually I'm older than them? *(Laughter.)*

SPOTLIGHT: Can you describe for your fans the process in which you draw a comics page? How quickly can you put together a page?

SALVA: Well, it depends if I want to maintain a high page production or a normal page production. If it is high, I draw two pages per day, one in the morning, one in the afternoon, and that has been the case for many years. Now I do pencils, inks and washes or with the computer I add lights; it depends on the project or on what I want.

The process is somewhat easy. When I receive the script, I read it, and I try to visualize in panels the action that will take place, then I put the pencil on the paper and I draw, there's nothing else to it. If there's a need to add things with the brush or the computer then I scan the page and I modify it with an adequate program or with the "real" brushes depending on what I want to achieve. Once this is done, I send it to the office through the internet.

SPOTLIGHT: Is there a label you can put on the style or styles that you draw in? Do you bring in influences from both American and European styles to your work? And can you give fans an idea of where your different influences might be visible in your work?

SALVA: I have, and this has been visible throughout all my career, these different influences- some of them stronger than others, some have been assimilated, and others have evolved. I don't think it's bad to have influences, because new tendencies make the artist improve. It has always been like this. What happens is that if there isn't an evolution of that which makes an impression on you, you can stay all your life a mere copy of other artists. The problem is that there's very little time to learn, the fans demand good artists and it is difficult to evolve for the better in so little time; everyday the fan is more impatient and the criticisms harsher. I think the only way to do good work is by not paying attention to criticisms, especially malicious criticisms, which unfortunately, there's lots of. There are people that think because they pay for the comic book they have the right to say whatever they want about the creative team and that's not true, sometimes they even insult on personal level.

In any case, I think you've got to maintain your level with your eyes open, looking at comics but also movies, advertising, videogames, etc... all of which are visual. It can be interesting to convert to the comics medium in order to improve them.

SALVA'S SPIDER-MAN: He's drawn everyone from the FF to the X-Men, but in Mark Waid's *House of M: Spider-Man* mini-series, he finally got to draw the friendly neighborhood Spider-Man! (From *House of M: Spider-Man #2.*)

SPOTLIGHT: What other art mediums do you work in? Painting?

SALVA: Well, I have only used that once, I did an *X-Men* cover with painting and Apocalypse's face done with paints, but now I do the cover on pencils. I ink the parts I deem necessary, then I do with a brush some parts, particularly face features.

Once this is done, I scan it and I add all the grey hues, which then I convert to color adjusting the hues and adding here and there, until I obtain the look I am looking for.

SPOTLIGHT: Do you ever make time to draw anything outside of comics? If so, what is some of your favorite subject matter?

SALVA: Usually I don't have much time for other things, but sometimes I have designed for videogames, board games, I have contributed to some movies, but not very often because comics need almost all my time, and when I do these things usually it's not on work hours so the production doesn't diminish.

SPOTLIGHT: If you were not a comic book artist for your profession, what do you think you would be doing today?
SALVA: Probably I would have tried to finish my college degree in architecture…anyway, I have some businesses outside of comics in case something happens…

DRAWING THE X-MEN

SPOTLIGHT: Over the years, you have had the opportunity to draw a great many mutants for all the different X-Men titles you have drawn. Which X-Men have been your favorites to draw, and why?

SALVA: After so many years, first reading their adventures, and then drawing them, I think I love them all the same, but I will always have a special place in my heart for the Claremont/Byrne team: Cyclops, Colossus, Storm, Nightcrawler, Wolverine, Phoenix, Beast, and Banshee. The passing of time hasn't made me forget them, and sometime in the future I would like to do something with that team, although I know it's difficult…

SPOTLIGHT: But not only are there heroes in the X-Men Universe, but there are also the bad guys! Which villains have been your favorite to draw, and why?

SALVA: I think that would be Magneto and Dr. Doom. Actually they are also heroes, but the current parameters of morality keep them on the bad guys side, deep inside they are fallen heroes.

SPOTLIGHT: You have drawn so many *X-Men* comics, it's very difficult to keep up with them! *X-Men, Uncanny X-Men, X-Treme X-Men*. Which particular stories from these different comics stand out to you as your favorites?

SALVA: Perhaps my first X-Treme arc. It took place in Valencia, which is my hometown. I put a lot of effort into it. And also it was the beginning of the series, my own series, and although I had to leave it before it ended, in my heart X-Treme will always be mine. Actually, I did all the covers till the end.

After that, drawing Uncanny was really exciting. It was the mother series of all the X-series. For me, it is and will always be the most important series, it doesn't matter if the others sell more.

SPOTLIGHT: Your last run on *X-Men*, which was the *Blood of the Apocalypse* arc, saw you doing your own inking and work credited as "washes." Can you explain to fans what that means, and how it is you decided to try that particular style for this particular story arc?
SALVA: Because I wasn't satisfied with my work, and I wanted to see what happened if I did something else. In X-Treme we didn't have inks and the ending result lacked consistency. Here I tried to ink the work myself — not all of it, just partially — and also add washes to soften and give texture to the pages, I wanted for them to have a "made by hand" look to differentiate them from all the other computer work we see constantly. I don't know if I achieved it, but I had fun doing it. Probably I will keep doing it, but with different touches, it depends on the time I have to do the pages.

SPOTLIGHT: So that is the kind of artwork we can expect to see more of from you as an evolution of your art style? Or is it just something you were trying with *Blood of the Apocalypse*?

SALVA: For now it was an experiment, but if I have the time and I like the scripts I will keep doing it. But mainly it depends on the time and the deadlines. I hate to be late. Like in all things, there are people who don't really notice the difference, and others do. I need to do things that give me pleasure. Drawing comics is the thing I like most, but I work alone and sometimes it's hard to motivate yourself to get to work. If I don't give myself some incentives it can be boring. Anyway, this is a creative job, and that implies change and evolution.

I'M THE JUGGERNAUT, &#*@&! : Juggsy takes on his former friend Black Tom Cassidy, who's now a tree! (If you ain't readin', don't ask! From *X-Men* #162.)

STAN LEE AND NEW UNIVERSAL

SPOTLIGHT: This fall, Marvel will publish Stan Lee Meets Doctor Doom, a one-shot written by Stan that will have you drawing the story! How does it feel to be handling a script by none other than Stan Lee?

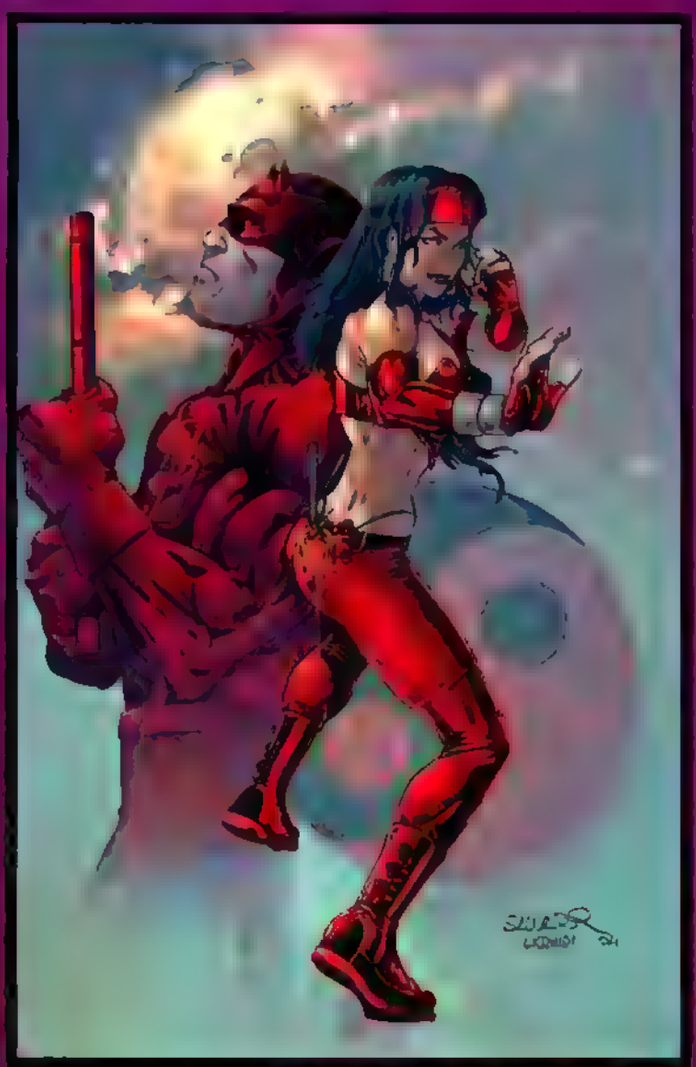
SALVA: It has been veryyyyy exciting since I was offered the job! I tried to make room in my schedule to be able to do that job, during months I started working two hours before the usual in order to give that job the necessary time. All in all, it was just ten pages and the cover.

I did all of it myself: pencils, inks and color. It has taught me somewhat how to use Photoshop because I had no idea. To the people who don't like it, I'm sorry, but that's the way I like to work, offering a more complete look as an artist. When another person inks or colors your work, what he is doing is interpreting what you draw, and even if he is very good, his vision is always very different from mine. That's why this time I wanted to do it all. It was a very special situation, and this time if the fans like it, it's my fault, and if they don't like it, it's my fault too!

You can imagine how excited I am about this if I tell you I have sent the originals to Stan Lee for him to dedicate them to me. I don't have anything drawn by me on the walls at home, but that cover with Stan Lee and Dr. Doom signed by him, my intention is to hang it in my studio.

SPOTLIGHT: What did you think when you heard that you would be drawing Stan Lee up face-to-face with Dr. Doom? Were you ever worried how you might draw Stan in some kind of fight with the evil Doctor?

STAN LEE MEETS DOCTOR DOOM: From the cover to the Stan Lee/ Salva collaboration!



More sensual linework from Salva, from the cover of *Ultimate Elektra #3.*

SALVA: To tell the truth, I already knew that with Stan writing the script, it was going to be fun, and actually this is the story I had the most fun with lately. It is as it should be: it's good fun.

I try to show with colors how cold castles are and also Latveria itself. If it would have been a story with Spider-Man or the Thing, the colors would have been more happy, but Doom is gloomy and serious, he doesn't know what a joke is.

I tried to keep a realistic look with Stan himself, and Doom, although realistic, is a little closer to the Doom we know from comics, I wanted to be noticeable that this is a kind of fantastic story, almost a What If, a meeting with the creator.

SPOTLIGHT: Stan is celebrating his 65th year in the comics business. Do you think you'd like to draw comics for 65 years?

SALVA: Of course! And I am sure of it. This, besides being my job, it's my hobby. I can't imagine my life without a pencil in hand. When I wasn't being published, I drew too, and if the doors in this business got closed for me in the future, probably I would keep drawing, if my health was good enough for it, of course.

SPOTLIGHT: Warren Ellis has a new project for Marvel premiering later this year, and it is a revival of the 1980s line of New Universe comics. How did you become involved with this project?

SALVA: I told Joe Quesada I wanted to do something different and important when I left the X-Men. I wanted a script that was fresh,

and after the conversation, a week later he offered me this, because it seems that Warren Ellis had liked the new treatment of my pages with washes.

SPOTLIGHT: Did you read the New Universe comics when they were first published? If so, did you have any particular favorite characters from the New Universe line? Or is this all new to you?

SALVA: No, to tell the truth when they came out I wasn't really interested in them. There's not a specific reason for that, but I think it's best like this, for not having read them I can't be conditioned by them. Anyway, the idea is not to tell the same story again. Warren has total freedom for interpreting those characters, that's what I was really interested in, he wasn't going to be limited by anything.

Many great writers become conventional writers when they write X-Men. This is due to the great amount of factors that don't allow to alter the continuity of the Marvel Universe, but this is new, and Warren can do whatever he wants, without any pressure coming from sales. I think it can really be a hit, and that's what I want to do, something that the fan will remember some years after reading it.

SPOTLIGHT: Does coming up with the visual concepts for newuniversal mean you have to do approach the comic in a way you are not used to? How much extra work goes into starting a new comic like this?

SALVA: It means a little investigation. We have to see what we want, Warren, the editor and me, by having an exchange of impressions and drawing sketches. It is tremendously creative because it hasn't been previously established, and we are starting from scratch. Warren is a writer that leaves room for the artist to shine, and I want to do it well.

SPOTLIGHT: Have you started to do sketch work and planning for newuniversal, or is it still too early for you to have started work on that project?

SALVA: I have developed some of the main characters, but there's still much to do... right now I am drawing Ultimate X-Men Annual, and at the same time I am drawing sketches for newuniversal, but as soon as I finish the Annual, I have already a couple of plots with which to begin newuniversal. Thus, while I am drawing the Annual, I have time to think how I will do it.

SPOTLIGHT: As one of Marvel's longest tenured comic artists, you have always been working within established universes like the mutant universe of the X-Men, or the Fantastic Four. But now, you have the opportunity to build the look of a "new universe" from the ground up. Is this something you are looking forward to?

SALVA: Sure, because right now I am a little tired of doing conventional superheroes, I needed a little change, and this is the project I was looking for. And also, everything is going to be new, but it's not going to be typical superheroes, those with the underwear over the trousers. *(Laughter.)*

Anyway, I love superheroes, and as soon as I get this itch to do something different out of my system, you can be sure I'll be back to spandex!

Whether he's drawing his characters in or out of spandex, Salvador Larroca will remain one of Marvel's go-to guys for drawing their comics. We'd like to wish Salva all the best while he toils away behind his drawing board in Spain, and recommend that readers check out his work on the upcoming Uncanny X-Men Annual and Stan Lee Meets Doctor Doom, and get ready for what is sure to be an exciting new collaboration with Warren Ellis as they dig into newuniversal!

STORM & BLACK PANTHER: The seeds for the wedding of the decade were planted in *X-Men #176*, which included these beautiful character renderings from Salva!

COLLECTED EDITIONS ROUNDUP:

SALVADOR LARR

After Grant Morrison's timeless run across *New X-Men #114-154*, the title was turned over to writer Chuck Austen and penciler Salvador Larroca. With *X-Men #157*, the book reverted back to its original title, *X-Men*. After a dozen issues, the writing chores were handed over to Peter Milligan (*X-Force/X-Statix*), but through it all, Salvador Larroca has carried the title over two years and thirty issues through its many changes in visual looks and cast rotations (save for a pair drawn by Roger Cruz.)

The following trades will give you a complete rundown of Salva's tenure on *X-Men*, and will introduce you to the team featuring Rogue, Iceman, Havok, Lorna Dane, and Gambit, with guest appearances by Cyclops, Emma Frost, Juggernaut, Storm, Black Panther and many others. Salva's plate was full and overflowing with artistic demands, with locations set in Antarctica, Africa, China and outer space, and dozens of characters coming in and out of the woodwork to give the X-Men help (and hell), and Salva come up all aces!

X-MEN: DAY OF THE ATOM

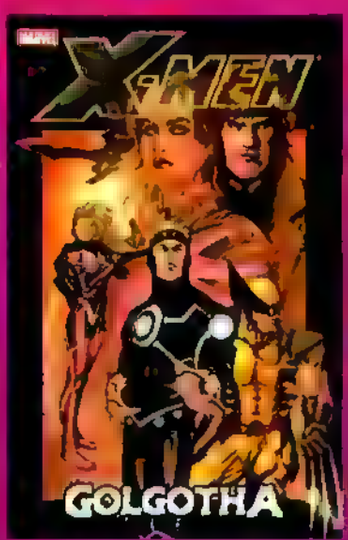
REPRINTS: X-Men #157-165

Havok leads the team into China to investigate the presence of an incredibly powerful mutant that sure looks to be none other than Xorn! (Hey, wasn't he dead?) Besides surviving an encounter with the Collective Man and his fellow Chinese guardians, there's also the question about what might tear the planet apart first: Xorn's cracked open skull that has the power of an exploding star, or the bickering X-Men who can't line up behind Havok's leadership? Plus, Xavier's mansion is attacked by a cadre of evil mutants led by Exodus, Sabretooth, and Black Tom, with Juggernaut and his loyalties caught in the middle!

BEST SALVA MOMENT: Salvador's lush Chinese landscapes and his too-cool depictions of the ravaged Xorn are real standouts, but his rendering of Black Tom, the longtime X-Men villain who's spirit now inhabits a tree, is so incredibly dynamic. Truly a villain who's bark is as lethal as his bite!

X-MEN: GOLGOTHA

REPRINTS: X-Men #166-170



Peter Milligan arrives to scribe *X-Men* after his critically acclaimed run on *X-Force/X-Statix*. Emma Frost is on scene to help guide the X-Men through solving the mysterious mass suicide of a utopian mutant colony in Antarctica. The name at the center of the intrigue is Golgotha, and putting the pieces together will see the X-Men traveling all over the planet, into outer space, and deep within their own psyches!

BEST SALVA MOMENT: Page 12 of *X-Men #167*, a splash page from right out of a George Romero flick, with a creepy assemblage of Golgotha-influenced mutants ready to sneak out from the shadows and attack!

X-MEN: BIZARRE LOVE TRIANGLE

REPRINTS: X-Men #171-174

Her name is Foxx, and she more than lives up to the name! No, silly, not like comedian Redd Foxx, like Foxx as in HOT! Salvador was supposed to amp up this young mutant's "hot" factor to eleven, and did he ever! Once she hooks up with the X-Men, a growing rift between lovers Gambit and Rogue grows even wider, as Rogue rightly senses something's not quite legit with the new girl in town. So does all hell break loose in this bizarre love triangle? Hey, this is X-Men comics we're talking about! Darn' tootin' !

BEST SALVA MOMENT: There are a lot of great splash pages, poses and covers featuring the "new girl" Foxx, but perhaps the best moment is the opening sequence of the story. Foxx is in a race-for-life to get past marauding human vigilantes and to the protection of the X-Men, and Salva (plus inker Danny Miki and colorist Liquid) heightens the suspense by depicting Foxx in monochromatic black figure drawings against a blood-red sky.

ROCA'S X-MEN

X-MEN/BLACK PANTHER: WILD KINGDOM

REPRINTS: X-Men #175-176, Black Panther #8-9

If it's about anything, this four-issue crossover with Reginald Hudlin's *Black Panther* is all about having fun! Both dialogue and artwork are grounded in a spirit of irreverence, as the X-Men travel to Africa to respond to a deadly surge in mutant activity; mutant animals are popping up everywhere and ravaging the local populace! The Cold War relic Red Ghost shows up with his high-larious Super Apes, and this collection is Ground Zero for the newfound romace between Storm and Black Panther. The wedding of the decade starts here!

BEST SALVA MOMENT: There's plenty of great moments to choose from here, among them Salva's wild-eyed mutant lion, his scary assemblage of rabid mutant crocodiles, and of course, his luscious depictions of African goddess Storm, but old school Black Panther fans will love Salva's half-page splash of the Panther's Priest-era Dora Milajae in *X-Men #176*. The costume design, clean and tight figure drawings, and just a general, off-the-charts hotness makes this the easy choice!

DECIMATION: X-MEN — THE DAY AFTER

REPRINTS: Decimation: House of M — The Day After and X-Men #177-181

The horrific conclusion of events brought on by the House of M is forever known as M Day, the worst day in the history of mutantkind. This collection picks up with *The Day After*, a double-sized one-shot drawn by Randy Green and Aaron Lopresti that covers the dramatic day when the X-Men survey the wasteland of their universe. The following issues of *X-Men* feature some exciting and tense action tableaus by Salvador, telling the story of what happens when the dreaded Sentinels arrive at the X-Mansion...to protect the X-Men? This collection also showcases the evolution of Iceman's powers and the possible depowering of a certain green-haired daughter of Magneto!

BEST SALVA MOMENT: The cover to *X-Men #178*. Wolverine gleefully rips a spooky looking Sentinel to shreds, making for a hauntingly resonant image.

X-MEN: THE BLOOD OF APOCALYPSE

REPRINTS: X-Men #182-186 and Cable/Deadpool #26-27

Apocalypse is back, and he's ready to reclaim Earth on behalf of mutantkind...and if he has to kill a bunch of mutants to get his way? So be it! To help him in his quest are the new Horsemen: Famine, Pestilence, Death and War. But just which mutants will transform themselves into Apocalypse's instruments of worldwide control? The answers will be shocking, to both the X-Men and you, the reader! Salvador finishes off his run with X-Men by adding his own inking and washes to his pencils, giving this series an elegant illustrative weight befitting its stature as his swansong with the title.

BEST SALVA MOMENT: His stunning character designs for Apocalypse's new breed of Four Horsemen, particularly Famine, who pops off the comics page in a white-hot burst of flame.

Salvador Larroca was charged with conceptualizing the character designs for each of Apocalypse's new Horsemen. Behold: Famine, War, Death, and Pestilence! *(In clockwise order, starting from the upper left image.)*

BULLPEN BULLETINS

ITEM! Almost twenty years in the making, Marvel marks the completion of the canonization of a legendary run of comics in the Masterworks library with the publication of FANTASTIC FOUR MASTERWORKS VOL. 10. It has been nineteen years since the first FF Masterworks hit store shelves, reprinting issues 1 through 10 of STAN LEE and JACK KIRBY'S seminal tales of the Marvel Age's first super hero comic, and now FF fans will finally have the chance to finish their collection of the complete 102-issue run in the full-color hardcover series. FF Vol. 10 will reprint issues #94-104, finishing off Jack Kirby's tenure as FF artist and throwing in two issues of JOHN ROMITA, SR. stories for good measure. (The two Romita issues conclude the story Jack left behind when he headed to DC Comics in 1970.) The core of any Masterworks volume will always be the original comics, but Masterworks editor Cory Sedlmeier is leavening the last Lee/Kirby volume with a generous amount of bonus materials, including editorial pieces by Roy Thomas and Mark Evanier, unpublished art, a character appearance chronology, and more! Nothing captures the enduring appeal of classic comic books like Masterworks, and this set of volumes should prove to be the crown jewel of the whole library!

ITEM! She was part of the Saturday morning holy trinity along with Spider-Man and Iceman, the true "star" of the Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends cartoon. She was FIRESTAR, and finally her four-issue limited series from the mid-80s will get its due when it is reprinted in its very own Marvel Digest! Firestar's origin story is complete in these four issues, following hot on the heels of her Saturday morning cartoon fame but well before she was firmly established in the Marvel Universe as a New Warrior and Avenger. Spider-Girl scribe TOM DEFALCO handled the writing chores, so it's a great chance for Mayday Parker fans to read Tom's earlier take on another super-powered ingénue. Drawn by MARY WILSHIRE and featuring a grand slam of an iconic cover by BARRY WINDSOR-SMITH, this is one Marvel Digest you don't wanna miss!

ITEM! Got a correction to note: in the Daniel Way/Olivier Coipel issue of Marvel Spotlight, we ran a Fan's Soapbox commentary without crediting the writer! That Marvelous Missive came courtesy of Dugan Trodglen of Atlanta, GA. You might recall that Fan's Soapbox of his regaled readers with Dugan's thoughts about today's Marvel writers and their use of comedy to tell stories. It was a great essay, with Dugan discussing how and why guys like Brian Michael Bendis and Dan Slott are slinging out some of the super-funny in our super hero comics! Still, my vote for funniest writer at Marvel goes to the gal in payroll who signs my paycheck! Now THAT is humor!

To find Marvel Comics at a local comic shop, call 1-888-COMICBOOK or visit marvel.com

NEXT ISSUE

Robert KIRKMAN

Greg LAND

ETERNALS #1-6
GAIMAN • ROMITA, JR.
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STAN LEE MEETS...
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LEE • LARROCA
FALL 2006